

CHOICE

www.choice.com.au

Supermarket prices

Does it make a
difference any more
where you shop?

Bank info lines:

More than half
their answers weren't
good enough

**Will your car
keep you safe in
an accident?**

TESTS:

• Washing machines • DVD players • Mobile phones



Banks: arrogance towards a captive audience



Jane Mackenzie

Many banks have closed branches and are encouraging their customers to use new technology instead, such as telephone information services (info lines). Not everyone likes using them, so CHOICE decided to check whether at least the 'big four' banks provide extra-good service to compensate.

They don't. They gave incorrect or unsatisfactory information to more than 60% of callers in a CHOICE survey — and one of the worst aspects was the number of callers who were told to go to a branch to get the information they needed. Catch 22?

What annoys some customers even more, though, is the way banks try to convince us that they've made all the changes because we, their customers, have asked for them.

As one bank customer wrote to us recently, "My pet hate is the claim that changes are made in response to 'customer demands' for such-and-such a service. I have been a customer of my bank for 20 years and have never been surveyed in any way to find out what I want. I haven't seen any evidence that changes are demand-driven. The fact that customers comply with the changes and come to accept them is not evidence that they wanted the changes. Customers are forced to do things the bank's way; they use our compliance as evidence that we must be happy, when in fact we have no real choice."

One of the questions we asked the bank info lines was about services for retirees. The overall average score for the four banks for answers to this question was a low 31% — and yet it's well-known that many older people in particular aren't comfortable getting information in any way other than in person at a branch.

It's hard to believe that they're among the banks' happy customers when they're not only forced to change their preferred banking habits, but also can't even rely on getting the right answers when they do.

For many people it's the banks' arrogance that rankles the most. We're a captive audience and they know it. In their cynicism they're clearly not afraid to show that they know it, when the services they do continue to offer so patently don't meet the needs of their customers.

Jane Mackenzie, Editor

Your letters

We welcome the letters you send us — please always include a daytime telephone number so we can contact you quickly if we want to follow up your letter. We're sorry we can't personally answer every letter we receive, but we do use them in our research. Thanks for taking the time to keep in touch.

Write to us at CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.

Phone us on (02) 9577 3399.

Fax us on (02) 9577 3355.

email us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au

World Wide Web address: www.choice.com.au

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Cover photo: Kent Mears



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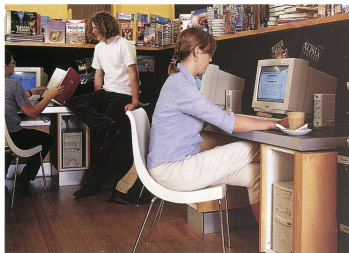
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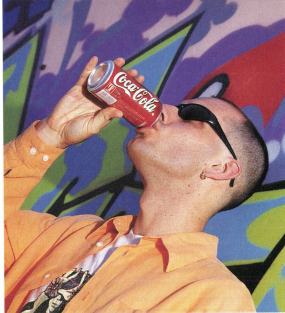
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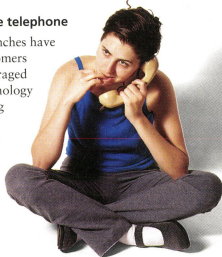
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Your subscription and the GST

The GST comes into effect on July 1, 2000, and will apply to any issues of CHOICE in your subscription period that go past this date. As a non-profit organisation we can't afford to absorb this cost and will be including it in the subscription price. So if you subscribe or renew your subscription any time between August 1999 and the end of June next year, some of the issues will attract the tax. After July 1, GST will apply to the whole subscription.

The order form on page 49 shows the subscription prices for periods starting from the next issue, and they'll be updated every month up to July 2000. If you have any queries about this, please call CHOICE Consumer Services on (02) 9577 3399 (or see the bottom of page 2 — far left — for further contact details).

Sick of trying to work out food labels?

IF YOU'RE A COMMITTED DIETER OR HAVE HEART problems, you're probably sick of trying to figure out, for example, which tub of hummus contains less fat, as the label often doesn't tell you.

All that's set to change following the current Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) overhaul of food standards. Under ANZFA's current proposals, it'll be compulsory for labels to list the amounts of fats, sodium, energy, protein and carbohydrates in foods, always in the same format. At the moment, it's only compulsory to give nutrition information for foods such as those claimed to be low-fat.

Manufacturers will also have to state how much meat's in your meat pie — under the

proposals, labels must give the percentage of all 'characterising' ingredients in foods.

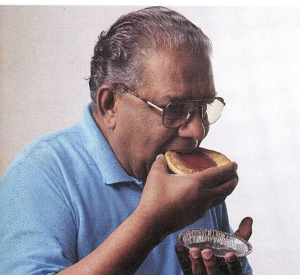
So what's a characterising ingredient? ANZFA says the term applies to an ingredient that appears in the name of a food, such as strawberries in strawberry yoghurt; one that consumers associate with the food, such as cocoa with chocolate; and ingredients emphasised on the label, perhaps appearing in a picture. CHOICE thinks this doesn't go far enough — the quantity of all ingredients should be disclosed.

You'll also get a clearer picture of how much water there is in the food you buy. Currently water is simply placed at the end of the list of ingredients, though other ingredients are ranked in descending order by weight. Under the proposals, water will take its proper place by quantity.

These regulations are expected to become law later this year, but they aren't set in stone — there's a risk they'll be watered down (no pun intended) in response to industry pressure. It's expected there'll be a transition period, with the new labels being compulsory in around two years.

CHOICE has been campaigning in this area for some years now and will continue to pressure ANZFA to make changes that'll give consumers more useful information and choice.

**How much meat's really in that pie?
Under proposed labelling regulations,
they'll have to tell you.**



Your invitation to...

The CHOICE Online Conference, February 16–18, 2000, on *Genetically modified food — Is it your choice yet?*
Where? www.choice.com.au.

We'd like you to visit our website and use the interactive discussion forums to read and share views on genetically modified (GM) food. At the conference, you'll find:

- Presentations by our special online guests, including Alan Lacey, Technical Manager for leading UK supermarket Sainsbury's. Alan will answer your questions about what's happening regarding GM foods in Europe.
- An update on current and planned government regulations for the production of GM foods.
- Contact details for government, food companies and supermarkets, so you can have your say about labelling of GM foods.

Invite your friends to join our first Online Conference too. Information about the conference will be available at www.choice.com.au from early February. If you can't visit the site, call us on (02) 9577 3333 and we'll send you a conference report after the event.

Can you help?

Are you a smoker or ex-smoker?

If so, we'd like to hear about your experiences:

- How many times have you tried to quit smoking?
- What made you decide to quit?
- What methods have you used and which have you found to be the most helpful and why? Which have not been helpful?
- What have you found to be the most difficult aspect of quitting?
- If you've quit, to what do you attribute your success?
- If you're still smoking, to what do you attribute your failure?
- Can you share any interesting experiences you have had with any products and services that promise to end your addiction?

Please write to us at **Quit Smoking**, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204; fax us on (02) 9577 3377, or email us at smoking@choice.com.au by February 28.

If you're willing to discuss your experiences further with CHOICE, please tell us in your response and include your contact details. Your response will

be treated in strict confidence — we won't publish any material without your consent.

Sharebrokers

We'd like to hear about your experiences with sharebrokers. We're especially interested if you've used an online broker.

Could you tell us:

- Do you use only one broker? If not, do you use different brokers for different services? Are you satisfied with what your broker offers?
- Have you used an online broker? What advantages or disadvantages do you see in using one? Do you have any concerns about doing this?
- Have you ever had problems with your broker? What was the problem and how was it resolved?
- Please write to **Brokers**, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, fax us on (02) 9577 3377, or email us at brokers@choice.com.au by February 15.

Thank you for your help.

Walking the thin grey line

Q. WHEN IS A HEALTH CLAIM NOT A HEALTH CLAIM?

A. When a clever marketing department spots the difference between the letter of the law and its spirit.

Our food laws are there to stop foods being marketed like medicines and making therapeutic claims. Yet at least two margarines, **Flora pro.active** and **Gold'N Canola**, are now making claims about the functional effects their ingredients can have on the body:

- "Reduces cholesterol from being absorbed into the bloodstream" — **Flora pro.active**.
- "Benefits heart function" — **Gold'N Canola**.

These claims keep to the letter of the law by not claiming to protect you from or cure you of a disease. But CHOICE thinks they're deviating from the spirit of the law, and it needs immediate revision to stop this kind of marketing claim.

Can the products work?

■ **Flora pro.active**

Studies show that the ingredients in **Flora pro.active** (plant sterols) can reduce the amount of cholesterol absorbed by the body, reducing blood cholesterol levels by around 10% whether or not you're on a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet. This may be of benefit to people with high cholesterol levels as part of an overall cholesterol-lowering diet. Unfortunately, the plant sterols also reduce the levels of some other important substances in the body, such as beta-carotene, although the implications of this are still being debated.

Another drawback is that you have to keep using the margarine to ensure an ongoing effect — and it's not cheap. A 250 g tub — half the size of a normal 500 g margarine tub — costs twice as much (around \$4). And for the amount you need to use (25 g per serve — enough for four slices of bread) it would only last one person 10 days.

The most important thing is that not everyone needs it — if your cholesterol isn't too high, you don't need to worry about reducing it, so you can save your money.

■ **Gold'N Canola**

This is made from canola oil, which is rich in a type of fat (omega-3) that isn't found in many other foods except oily fish. Getting the balance right between omega-3 fats and other essential fats, called omega-6 fats, is important. We often end up getting more omega-6 fats because they're found in more commonly eaten polyunsaturated oils and spreads, such as sunflower and safflower. Swapping these types of oils and spreads for canola-based ones can help move the balance back.

The trick here is that any canola oil will do — not just **Gold'N Canola**.

All fats contain calories, so don't overdo either product. And don't just *add* them to your diet — if you think your diet can benefit from either, swap them for your usual spread or oil.

The bottom line? They can be useful, but they're not magic health bullets.



Our food laws are meant to stop foods being marketed like medicines and making therapeutic claims. These two margarines keep to the letter of the law but make a mockery of its spirit.



CHOICE is one of many consumer magazines from organisations worldwide that make up

Consumers International.

Get the lowdown on what's happening with your fellow consumers around the world in **World Consumer Snapshot**.

■ Food — what's in it for us?

Unfortunately not always just the nutrients it's supposed to provide.

In five European countries, 70% of food from cans contains traces of the lacquer, supposedly carcinogenic, that coats the metal interior. Tests of 400 different canned foods from France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Italy showed traces of the lacquer-coating chemicals BADGE and BFDGE, according to Belgian consumer magazine *Test Achats*. The highest lacquer traces were found in canned fish and foods with acidic ingredients, such as lemon, tomato and vinegar. There's no legislation governing the lacquer in Belgium or at European Union level. In the report, consumers were advised to drain canned food and not eat too much of it.

■ A nice cup of...

While antioxidants are all the rage these days when assessing the benefits of a cup of tea, Germany's *Test* has come up with some less than encouraging data for tea drinkers. It tested 90 black teas and 30 jasmine teas for pesticide residues and found that:

- Three of 12 Chinese teas had high pesticide residues; only two had none.
- Of 30 jasmine teas (mostly from China), 24 had high residues.
- All but two teas from Darjeeling and Assam had minor residues.
- None of the black teas from Sri Lanka and Kenya had any residues.

Combined with previous tests conducted on green teas, these results seem to indicate that Chinese teas have a pesticide problem.

If you want to be sure you get a jasmine tea free of residues, *Test* recommends you go for an organically grown one.

■ Raw deal for sprout lovers

The end of the world is nigh... That last bastion of health foods, the humble raw bean sprout, has been branded potentially dangerous in the US. *Consumer Reports* tells us that 1000 Americans have fallen ill since 1995, and one has died, following numerous outbreaks of salmonella and *E.coli* poisoning from contaminated sprouts. The seeds used to grow them can be contaminated by manure, and the temperature and moisture required for sprouting provide an ideal environment for bacteria. As a result, Americans are encouraged to boil their sprouts.

Money finders

"I AM WRITING TO ADVISE YOU that we have located \$148.20 that legally belongs to Charles ..." said the letter received by Charles and Eileen from a company called Money Finders. The company promised them the mysterious funds if they provided proof of identity and gave the company the authority to claim the funds on their behalf, for a fee of \$45.

"We first thought it was some kind of scam," says Eileen. They were even more puzzled when they received another letter a few days later, this time from a company called Money Claimers, who asked for a fee of 30% of the funds, but said, "Please note our fee is negotiable if you receive a letter from another recovery agent."

Like Eileen and Charles, hundreds of other people were receiving such letters after the NSW Government published in the *Government Gazette* the names and last known addresses of the owners of 'unclaimed money' it had received in the last 12 months.

Unclaimed money can be, among other things, proceedings of deceased estates, shareholdings or superannuation contributions. The funds become unclaimed money when the holder of the funds can't locate the owner. This can happen, for example, if you move out of a rented property without leaving a forwarding address and the real estate agent can't contact you to refund your bond.

After six years the funds become unclaimed money and are transferred to the state government or another public body to be held in trust. (Unclaimed money in bank and credit union accounts is transferred to the Commonwealth Government after seven years. Unlike in the bank account, the money doesn't earn any interest when the government holds it.)

In the past three years, the NSW Government alone has received \$41.3 million in unclaimed money, belonging to more than 500,000 people (sums range from \$1 to \$500,000).

The good news is that if some of this money belongs to you, you can retrieve it without payment by contacting the state government and providing proof of identity. Charles and Eileen, for example, had to prove that they really lived at their



PETER BAXTER

former address. "We had to send them a copy of an old driver's licence and some other documents," says Eileen.

And the mysterious funds? "It seems they're probably some shares we'd forgotten about. When I called they told me there was also another sum of \$3.90 that could be a dividend," says Eileen.

Contacts

If you receive a letter from a recovery agent, don't shell out for them to get your money: contact the relevant government office in your state (see above right) and ask it to conduct a database search (for funds held by the Commonwealth and the WA Government you can conduct a search on their Internet site). It can also advise

you what steps to take in case they aren't holding your money.

■ **ACT:** Registrar's Office, Unclaimed Monies, (02) 6207 0461.

■ **NSW:** Office of State Revenue, (02) 9689 6174.

■ **NT:** Department of Treasury, (08) 8999 6620.

■ **Queensland:** Public Trustees Office, (07) 3213 9368.

■ **SA:** Treasury and Finance, Unclaimed Monies Officer, (08) 8226 3601.

■ **Tasmania:** Treasury & Finance, (03) 6233 2948.

■ **Victoria:** State Trustees, (03) 9667 6418.

■ **WA:** Department of Treasury, Unclaimed Monies Officer,

(08) 9222 9185, or search the website at www.treasury.wa.gov.au/finpubunc.html.

If you've moved and lost contact with your bank or super fund, first try to contact the company that held the account. If you can't locate it or it can't help you, contact the following:

■ Bank accounts:

Commonwealth Treasury: 1800 020 008 or (02) 6263 3165, or search the website at www.treasury.gov.au (follow the prompts for publications and then unclaimed money).

■ Superannuation

The Australian Taxation Office, Superannuation Lost Members' Register: 13 10 20.

■ Life Insurance and shares

The ASIC infoline on 1300 300 630.

Corrections

House and contents insurance

CHOICE Special Report

On page 19 of this special report received by new CHOICE subscribers, the correct contact number for **WESTERN QBE** is 131 101.

Health insurance

CHOICE, November 1999

CBHS applies the excess once per person or twice per family, per year, not twice a year as stated. This changes the score for the **CBHS Hospital a** policy from 81% to 82% (with an excess) and for the **CBHS Hospital b** policy from

66% to 67% (with an excess). The changes also mean if you're in NSW and are eligible to join (a past or current employee of the Commonwealth Bank, or a dependant), CBHS is a Best Buy in the 'Full cover with excess' option.

On page 28, **HCF Top Plus** is shown as costing \$1383.20 with a \$1000 excess. The excess should be \$500.

Cockroach killers

CHOICE, December 1999

DEAD END Cockroach Insecticide Mats will sell for \$4.95 per pack, not \$4 as stated in the article.

● YOURletters

Insurance more widely available

I refer to the article on health insurance in your November 1999 issue, and in particular to your information on page 29 that the NSW Teachers Federation health insurance scheme (which you rated as one of the full hospital cover Best Buys for the ACT/NSW) was "Available to NSW teachers and their families".

In fact, this insurance scheme is open to teachers and their families throughout Australia if they're a member of the appropriate union. My wife and I, although now retired, are members. I have been a member of other health insurance schemes in the past, and this one is far and away the best ever, for our purposes.

Would it be possible to give this a brief mention in a future issue of CHOICE?

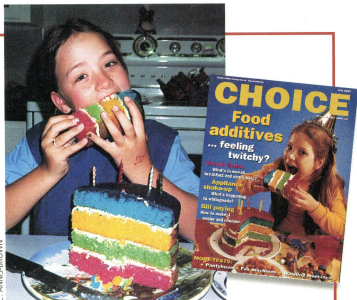
Bruce Shields
Camberwell, Victoria

Bruce is right: the NSW Teachers Federation Top Hospital Cover is available to teachers who are members of appropriate unions, regardless of which state you live in. With a score of 90% (or 86% with an excess), it could be well worth considering if you're eligible.

Let them eat cake

Thank you for your inspiration for my daughter Emma's ninth birthday cake (CHOICE, July 1999). On seeing the July issue she immediately asked: "Could I please have that cake for my birthday, Mummy?" It was a great hit with her friends as well. Except for the fact that she wanted purple icing, I think we had a pretty good match!

C Annis-Brown
Moree, NSW



Soaking in the washing machine

The past two washing machines I've owned have experienced failure by the same means. They were top loaders of different brands and sizes, and I believe this problem affects most top-loading machines.

The base plate connecting the bowl to the driveshaft on my machines was made from cheap, unprotected diecast material. This part is immersed in the wash water when washing or soaking. As bleaches and some detergents are caustic, this part corrodes quickly, the first sign of trouble being a recurring out-of-balance

condition. Failure can occur within as little as 18 months, the spare parts dealer told me.

A solution for this would be for the manufacturers to use a better-quality material to produce this part. This would probably cost a little more, but could increase the life of a significant proportion of machines dramatically, not to mention the savings in repair costs. Selling fewer machines and parts is hardly an incentive, though.

So, what can the consumer do? I painted the offending part with a paint resistant to slightly caustic solutions. This should help, but required disassembly of the machine. In particular, don't soak washing in the machine, if you can avoid it, especially in bleach or nappy soakers, and especially overnight. Use a trough or bucket instead.

Steve Risbey
Alexander Heights, WA

We discussed the issue with three manufacturers, who all agreed that bleaches and soakers containing oxidising agents such as chlorine bleach (sodium hypochlorite) shouldn't be used in a washing

machine because they attack some metals. If you want to use your machine for soaking, check with the manufacturer whether it's safe to do so.

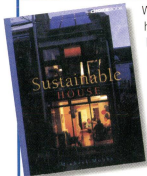
Napisan (and many other prewash soakers) no longer contain chlorine bleach but sodium perborate. While the manufacturer of Napisan (Bencisker Australia) told us it was OK for use in a washing machine, we think sodium perborate (an oxidising agent) could also attack some metals with prolonged use, and should therefore be used with caution.

Other manufacturers of soakers containing sodium perborate advise on their labels to avoid soaking in metal containers (use a plastic-lined tub or bucket instead) and avoid using it on garments with metal accessories such as zippers or buttons for more than an hour. To be on the safe side, we'd like to add to this list of precautions that you take care not to let the soaking solution drip down the sides of your washing machine when you put the soaked garments in the machine, to avoid possible damage to the machine's metal frame.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. To thank you for writing to us, Your Letters awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Steve Risbey, of Alexander Heights, WA, receives *Sustainable House*, or any other book of his choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 26 to 28.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.



Super competition

In the supermarket world, Franklins is facing competition as the store of choice for the money-conscious shopper. And the competition's about to increase, with German chain Aldi preparing to move into the Australian market.

IN BRIEF

- **CHEAPEST CHAIN:** Franklins (but only just!).
- **CHEAPEST CITY:** Newcastle.
- **CHEAPEST STATES:** SA, NSW.
- **MOST EXPENSIVE CHAIN:** Coles (but only just!).
- **MOST EXPENSIVE CITIES:** Launceston, Hobart, Bunbury.
- **MOST EXPENSIVE STATE:** Tasmania.

IF YOU KEEP AN EAGLE EYE ON SUPERMARKET prices, you may have suspected that there's less price difference between the major players than there used to be. And our latest survey of supermarket prices suggests you'd be right. In every survey since 1994, Franklins has come out ahead, with its average 'basket' of shopping at least 5% cheaper than that of the most expensive chain's.

This time Franklins was again the cheapest, but the gap's closed to 2%. If you'd bought our basket's contents every week at the 1998 average basket price, choosing Franklins instead of the most expensive chain would have saved you \$345.80 over the year. But at the 1999 survey prices, your savings would tot up to only \$74.36 — probably not enough to entice you away from your closest supermarket.

According to Franklins CEO Ian Cornell, this isn't because Franklins has become more expensive. It's still his objective to "remain the price leader", but Franklins is facing increased competition from the other chains.

How the major supermarkets compare: % more or less than average price

Chain or group (number of stores surveyed)	Average 1999 basket price	Compared to overall average price of \$72.27
Franklins (29) (A)	\$71.35	1% cheaper
Woolworths (32) (B)	\$72.68	1% more expensive
Coles (34)	\$72.78	1% more expensive

(A) Includes Big Fresh, Fresh and No Frills stores.

(B) Includes Safeway.

To ensure the comparisons are fair, we've excluded states where one or more of these supermarkets don't compete. We've also adjusted the figures to take account of grocery spending in each state.



So for the moment it seems you can't save a great deal by changing supermarkets. But that could change as the huge German discounter, Aldi, moves in. The family-owned company has confirmed it plans to start trading in Australia this year, but it's keeping details close to its chest.

Dr Alan Treadgold, executive director of the Australian Centre for Retail Studies, thinks Aldi will begin trading in Sydney and then expand to other areas. It's not yet clear what effect Aldi (which specialises in low-cost foods at the expense of a wide range) will have on Australian supermarket prices. In the UK, supermarket groups responded to the Aldi challenge by showing they offered a broader range of products and services (such as petrol and banking) rather than by dropping their prices.

Price hikes — and drops

Since our last price survey, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for food has gone up by about 4%. As you'd expect, most of the basket's contents have gone up by roughly that much. But a few products show price rises that outstrip inflation by a long



way — the largest price jump was 11% for white bread.

For bread, our pricers simply pick the cheapest available white sliced loaf in each store, so the price increase doesn't reflect an increase in any one brand. An industry source says cheap white bread has been used as a 'loss leader'. This means it's sold at a very cheap price — in fact, at a loss — to lure shoppers into the store. Once there, it's hoped they'll buy other products, so the store will ultimately make a profit even though it's making a loss on the bread. So the price increase we found could be a result of supermarkets being less ready to run with bread as a loss leader.

We calculated the price changes from the last survey using base prices for each item and ignoring all specials. Otherwise, if there'd been, say, a rash of specials on an item in the

last survey that wasn't repeated in this one, it could look like a big price rise.

However, specials can become part of the pricing environment for some items. For example, the price of Kleenex toilet rolls appears not to have changed. But according to manufacturer Kimberly-Clark, the tissue market has become increasingly competitive over the past few years, with more imports from Indonesia. It's now rare, the company says, to walk into a supermarket and not see a special offer on toilet rolls. Manufacturers have to be prepared to provide supermarkets with more frequent specials to compete.

It's bad news for manufacturers, but good news for shoppers. The price changes for all the items in the basket are listed in Table 1 (above right).

What's going on in Wollongong?

The average basket price has increased by between 3% and 5% in most cities, which is roughly what you'd expect with inflation at 4% for food. Prices in Wollongong and Bendigo, however, appear to have

Table 1. Basket contents price changes since 1998

Product (in order of % price change)	Size	Price change (%)
Bread, white sliced	680 g	11
Canola cooking oil	750 mL	8
Pine-O-Cleen disinfectant	500 mL	8
SPC baked beans	425 g	8
Arnott's Tim Tam biscuits	200 g	7
Coca-Cola	1.25 L	6
Colgate Gel toothpaste	120 g	6
Milk	1 L	6
Palmolive soap	500 g	5
Ski d'Lite yoghurt	400 g	5
Cream	300 mL	4
Dolmio Chunky pasta sauce	575 g	4
Just Juice orange juice	1 L	4
Lipton teabags	100 bags	4
Palmolive dishwashing liquid	500 mL	4
CSR/Bundaberg sugar	2 kg	3
McCain frozen peas	500 g	3
Vegemite	235 g	3
Go-Cat cat food biscuits	1 kg	2
Kraft Singles cheese	12	2
San Remo spaghetti	500 g	2
Sorbent tissues	224 sheets	2
Sunwhite long-grain rice	2 kg	2
Bacon	250 g	1
Butter	250 g	1
Heinz tomato sauce	600 mL	1
Nescafé coffee	100 g	1
Goulburn Valley peach slices	825 g	0
Kleenex toilet rolls	1620 sheets	0
Cold Power laundry detergent	1 kg	-2
Kellogg's Cornflakes breakfast cereal	275 g	-2
Chum canned dog food	1.2 kg	-3

Note: As this survey's basket isn't exactly the same as the last one, we recalculated the old price to make this comparison.

Price watch

Do you often come out of the supermarket wondering how on earth you spent so much? It's hard enough to keep a handle on the prices of items with seasonal price variations and specials. It gets even harder when package sizes keep changing; earlier this year, for example, the media spotlighted beer bottles that had shrunk but not become cheaper.

We'd like to keep a closer eye on prices — with your help. So if you spot a huge price hike or a shrinking pack, let us know. We'll be setting up a new 'price watch' forum on our website (www.choice.com.au) for you to let us know what's going on and to let you chat to other CHOICE shoppers.

Most products in our basket have gone up more or less in line with the 4% inflation rate for food. When items have gone up by considerably more than that (left in the photo) or gone down (right) the reasons aren't always simple (see Price hikes — and drops, left).



jumped by 9% and 7% respectively (see Table 2, right).

According to Coles and Franklins, last time we visited these cities prices were artificially low: there were more specials in the area than usual because of increased local competition. Apparently we're seeing prices coming back to their real level.

There's good news for one group of isolated shoppers used to paying more for their groceries than the rest of the country. Darwin's average basket price hasn't increased. It's possible this is linked to the recent Senate inquiry into food prices in remote areas, though the same effect wasn't evident in Hobart.

It's where you live that counts

Elsewhere, the survey shows that, as always, the higher cost of getting groceries to remote locations is being passed on to the shopper. This has a huge impact on prices: the basket cost almost \$19 less in the average Newcastle shop than in Launceston (the cheapest and most expensive cities respectively). For details of each city's average price, see Table 2 (right).

How much you can save by shopping around also varies from city to city. The dearest basket bought in Melbourne, for example, cost only \$2.34 more than the cheapest — and we visited 15 stores. But Sydneysiders appear to have a greater range of prices, with an \$8.06 variation in basket prices. For a breakdown of prices in the stores we visited, see page 11.

Table 2. Towns ranked by price and price increases since 1998

Rank	City	Average basket price	Price increase (%)
1	Newcastle	\$66.17	3
2	Queanbeyan	\$70.86	*
3	Adelaide	\$71.38	5
4	Mt Gambier	\$71.60	*
5	Toowoomba	\$71.84	3
6	Central Coast	\$71.85	5
7	Brisbane	\$72.11	6
8	Gold Coast	\$72.22	3
9	Sydney	\$72.38	4
10	Ballina	\$72.57	*
11	Melbourne	\$72.69	4
12	Ballarat	\$72.92	3
13	Canberra	\$72.98	2
14	Bendigo	\$73.03	7
15	Dubbo	\$73.32	*
16	Geelong	\$73.78	3
17	Townsville	\$73.83	*
18	Wollongong	\$75.29	9
19	Darwin	\$75.58	0
20	Albany	\$77.05	*
21	Perth	\$77.57	1
22	Bunbury	\$78.60	5
23	Hobart	\$83.39	3
24	Launceston	\$84.87	4

* This town wasn't included in the last survey.

Our survey

Over two days last September shoppers surveyed prices in 143 supermarkets in 24 cities and towns throughout Australia.

They priced a basket of food and grocery items you'd probably buy regularly: rice, teabags, tissues and so on. We specified a brand for most items, such as Arnott's Tim Tams, but our shoppers just chose the cheapest for others, such as white bread. Fresh meat, fruit and vegetables were excluded — not all supermarkets sell them and to compare prices for fresh produce, it must be of the same quality. For details of the basket's contents, see Table 1, page 9.

We made the survey less predictable this time, as we think some shops artificially lowered their prices when they thought we were coming last time (see CHOICE, July 1998). So this time our shoppers priced anonymously (they used to ask permission from the shops, as a courtesy), and visited some shops we haven't visited before. To be less obvious, they also priced slightly fewer items than before.

So there's not quite as much comparative price information in this report as in previous years. However, it's important that we get accurate information that isn't skewed, so we'll keep chopping and changing the survey as necessary.



Fond of a Tim Tam with your tea? Their price has gone up by 7% since our last survey.

How much did the basket cost?

ADELAIDE, SA

1	Franklins No Frills, Port Adelaide	\$69.62
2	Bi-Lo, Port Adelaide	\$69.97
3	Woolworths, Glenelg	\$70.39
4	Woolworths, Elizabeth	\$70.84
5	Bi-Lo, Glenelg East	\$71.24
6	Coles, Port Adelaide	\$71.47
7	Coles, Elizabeth	\$71.85
8	Coles, Glenelg	\$73.17
9	Franklins No Frills, Elizabeth Park	\$73.83

ALBANY, WA

1	Coles, Albany	\$76.79
2	Woolworths, Albany	\$77.30

BALLARAT, VIC

1	Franklins Fresh, Ballarat	\$72.46
2	Coles, Ballarat	\$72.56
3	Safeway, Sebastopol	\$72.59
4	Rainbow IGA, Ballarat	\$74.07

BALLINA, NSW

1	Franklins Fresh, Ballina	\$71.54
2	Woolworths, Ballina	\$72.46
3	Coles, Ballina	\$73.71

BENDIGO, VIC

1	Franklins, Kangaroo Flat	\$72.56
2	Bi-Lo, Bendigo	\$72.83
3	Safeway, Bendigo	\$72.94
4	Coles, Bendigo	\$73.78

BRISBANE, QLD

1	Franklins Fresh, Stafford	\$69.44
2	Franklins Big Fresh, Capalaba	\$70.16
3	Franklins Fresh, Mt Gravatt	\$70.85
4	Coles, Capalaba	\$71.55
5	Woolworths, Kenmore	\$72.40
6	Woolworths, Upper Mt Gravatt	\$72.47
7	Bi-Lo, Stafford Heights	\$72.55
8	Woolworths, Capalaba	\$72.68
9	Woolworths, Stafford	\$72.69
10	Coles, Upper Mt Gravatt	\$72.71
11	Coles, Kenmore	\$75.69

BUNBURY, WA

1	Coles, Bunbury	\$78.08
2	Woolworths, Bunbury	\$79.12

CANBERRA, ACT

1	Coles, Belconnen	\$71.52
2	Coles, Tuggeranong	\$71.90
3	Woolworths, Tuggeranong	\$71.96
4	Woolworths, Belconnen	\$72.22
5	Franklins No Frills, Belconnen	\$73.12
6	Woolworths, Woden	\$74.05
7	IGA, Garra	\$76.11

CENTRAL COAST, NSW

1	Franklins No Frills, Erina	\$68.34
2	Woolworths, Erina	\$70.40
3	Franklins No Frills, Woy Woy	\$71.05
4	Jewel, Erina	\$71.63
5	Coles, Woy Woy	\$73.99
6	Woolworths, Woy Woy	\$75.66

DARWIN, NT

1	Coles, Casuarina	\$75.01
2	Woolworths, Nightcliff	\$75.08
3	Woolworths, Casuarina	\$75.46
4	Bi-Lo, Casuarina	\$76.79

DUBBO, NSW

1	Franklins No Frills, Dubbo	\$72.43
2	Coles, Dubbo	\$72.52
3	Woolworths, Dubbo	\$75.00

GEELONG, VIC

1	Coles, Belmont	\$73.01
2	Franklins No Frills, Waurn Ponds	\$73.09
3	Franklins Fresh, Corio	\$73.17
4	Coles, Corio	\$73.57
5	Bi-Lo, Belmont	\$73.76
6	Safeway, Town & Country SC, Waurn Ponds	\$76.09

GOLD COAST, NSW/QLD

1	Bi-Lo, Nerang	\$71.71
2	Coles, Tweed Heads	\$71.73
3	Woolworths, Tweed Heads	\$72.04
4	Coles, Nerang	\$72.57
5	Franklins Big Fresh, Nerang	\$73.05

HOBART, TAS

1	Coles, Sandy Bay	\$81.86
2	Coles, Rosny Park	\$82.08
3	Purity, Rosny Park	\$82.85
4	Purity, Sandy Bay	\$83.88
5	Purity, Claremont	\$84.33
6	Tiger Superbarn, Claremont	\$85.31

LAUNCESTON, TAS

1	Coles, Mowbray	\$82.97
2	Roelf Vos, Newnham	\$84.72
3	Festival IGA, Prospect	\$86.93

MELBOURNE, VIC

1	Franklins Big Fresh, Doncaster	\$71.75
2	Franklins No Frills, Preston	\$71.92
3	Bi-Lo, Werribee	\$71.97
4	Franklins No Frills, Werribee	\$72.00
5	Safeway, Prahran	\$72.42
6	Safeway, Werribee	\$72.59
7	Coles, Doncaster	\$72.60
8	Coles, Dandenong	\$72.61
9	Safeway, Doncaster	\$72.72
10	Coles, Preston	\$72.76
11	Safeway, Preston	\$72.94
12	Coles, Werribee	\$73.01
13	Safeway, Dandenong	\$73.08
14	Jewel Warehouse Store, Werribee	\$73.82
15	Coles, Prahran	\$74.09

MT GAMBIER, SA

1	Woolworths, Mt Gambier	\$70.59
2	Coles, Mt Gambier	\$71.50
3	Bi-Lo, Mt Gambier	\$72.71

NEWCASTLE, NSW

1	Franklins No Frills, Wallsend	\$64.80
2	Bi-Lo, Belmont	\$65.74
3	Woolworths, Mount Hutton	\$65.95
4	Coles, Wallsend	\$66.26
5	Coles, Belmont	\$66.44
6	Bi-Lo, Mount Hutton	\$67.85

PERTH, WA

1	Woolworths, Warwick	\$75.09
2	Action Fresh, East Fremantle	\$75.46
3	Coles, Warwick	\$75.63
4	Action Fresh, Midland	\$76.62
5	Coles, Midland	\$77.66
6	Coles, Fremantle	\$77.90
7	Coles, Subiaco	\$78.26
8	Dewsons, South Fremantle	\$78.75
9	Woolworths, Midland	\$79.09
10	Woolworths, Subiaco	\$79.20
11	Farmer Jacks, Midland	\$79.65

QUEANBEYAN, NSW

1	Franklins Fresh, Queanbeyan	\$69.08
2	Coles, Queanbeyan	\$70.17
3	Woolworths, Queanbeyan	\$73.32

SYDNEY, NSW

1	Franklins Big Fresh, Campbelltown	\$67.54
2	Coles, Campbelltown	\$68.96
3	Franklins Big Fresh, Leichhardt	\$69.12
4	Woolworths, Campbelltown	\$70.17
5	Jewel Warehouse Store, Campbelltown	\$70.65
6	Woolworths, Leichhardt	\$70.90
7	Franklins No Frills, Blacktown	\$71.14
8	Franklins No Frills, Castle Hill	\$71.21
9	Franklins No Frills, Hurstville	\$73.04
10	Franklins No Frills, Neutral Bay	\$73.23
11	Coles, Hurstville	\$73.38
12	Jewel, Hurstville South	\$73.97
13	Coles, Castle Hill	\$74.26
14	Woolworths, Blacktown	\$74.70
15	Coles, Neutral Bay	\$74.90
16	IGA, Castle Hill	\$75.07
17	Woolworths, Neutral Bay	\$75.09
18	Coles, Blacktown	\$75.60

TOOWOOMBA, QLD

1	Franklins Big Fresh, Toowoomba	\$71.64
2	Coles, Toowoomba	\$71.69
3	Woolworths, Wilsonton	\$72.19

TOWNSVILLE-AITKENVALE, QLD

1	Franklins Fresh, Aitkenvale	\$73.09
2	Coles, Aitkenvale	\$74.13
3	Woolworths, Aitkenvale	\$74.28

WOLLONGONG, NSW

1	Franklins No Frills, Wollongong	\$73.11
2	Jewel Food Barn, Wollongong	\$74.13
3	Woolworths, Corimal	\$74.65
4	Coles, Corimal	\$75.30
5	Woolworths, Wollongong	\$76.73
6	Payless, Corimal	\$77.84

SC Shopping centre.

The basket isn't exactly the same as the last survey's, and we visited different stores, so prices can't be directly compared with the figures published last time.

The GST and your weekly shopping bill

In six months the 10% GST will apply to the basket of groceries you buy each week. The good news is that most food is GST-free and shouldn't become dearer. Some groceries should even drop in price, as they're now subject to a sales tax that'll disappear under the GST.

The bad news is that the GST will apply to some foods, such as doughnuts, so their price is likely to rise. It'll also apply to prepared, restaurant and takeaway food.

You'll also pay it on toiletries and household cleaners, but as you'll no longer pay 22% sales tax on these items, they should become cheaper. But there are anomalies: toothbrushes, for example, aren't now subject to sales tax (though toothpaste is) but will be subject to the GST.

A cheaper basket

We took the average price for each item, subtracted sales tax and added GST where appropriate. Overall, the basket cost \$3.12 less.

This is a very simple look at the direct effect of GST on food prices (and it ignores retail mark-ups). The tax changes will, of course, also affect the running costs of businesses. For food, business costs should drop very slightly, and that drop ought to trickle down into grocery prices.

Confused? You're not alone

What is and isn't taxed is already confusing. For example, chocolate flavouring for milk isn't subject to sales tax now, but other flavours are. All flavours will be GST-free. As for fruit juices, the tax changes are enough to make your mind boggle. You're currently paying 22% sales tax for drinks containing less than 25% juice, and 12% for those containing more than 25% juice. Under the new system, you'll pay 10% GST for drinks containing less than 90% juice and nothing for drinks containing more.

So it's hard to work out what price changes you'll see. To make it a little easier, we've separated food into four tax categories — see *GST changes*, right.

The complexity of the tax changes means there's room for manipulation by cynical suppliers, who could fail to pass sales tax savings on to consumers, while passing on the increased cost of the GST. The ACCC

will be monitoring supermarket prices regularly over a three-year period to ensure this isn't happening. If you notice any suspicious prices, you can report them to the ACCC on its freephone number, 1300 302 502.

For more information on the GST and the debate surrounding its introduction, go to our website: www.choice.com.au. More information's also available from the Australian Taxation Office at www.taxreform.ato.gov.au.

GST changes

Category 1: Foods currently sales tax free that will be GST-free.

These shouldn't change in price:

- Meat and processed meat products such as sausages.
- Cold meats, bacon and smallgoods.
- Uncooked chicken (cooked chicken will be GST-free if it's sold cold).
- Fresh fish and seafood.
- Vegetables, fruit, seeds and nuts.
- Flour and sugar.
- Rice and pasta.
- Cooking oil.
- Bread (without filling or a sweet coating).
- Eggs, cheese and milk (including soy and rice milk).
- Butter, cream and yoghurt.
- Tea, coffee and malt preparations.
- Infant and invalid formula.
- Soup (tinned, dried and prepared).
- Sauces, gravy mixes and condiments.
- Canned food.
- Cake mixes and breakfast cereals.
- Chocolate milk flavouring powder.

Category 2: Foods currently subject to sales tax that will be GST-free. These should drop in price:

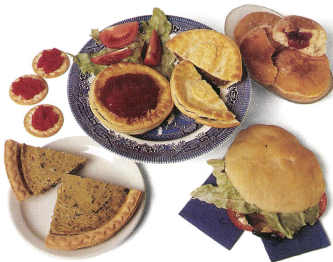
- Fruit and vegetable juices (over 90% juice).
- Milk flavouring powders (except chocolate).

Category 3: Foods currently subject to sales tax that will be subject to GST. As sales tax is higher than GST, these should drop slightly in price:

- Confectionery (including muesli bars and health bars).
- Chips, crisps and salted nuts.
- Biscuits, cookies, crackers and pretzels.
- Ice cream and frozen yoghurt.
- Soft drink (including fruit drinks containing less than 90% juice), flavoured milk and cordial.
- Pet food.

Category 4: Foods currently sales tax free that will be subject to GST. These are likely to rise in price:

- Hamburgers, hot dogs, pizzas and quiches.
- Pies, pasties and sausage rolls.
- Sandwiches and rolls.
- Doughnuts, pastries and tarts.
- Caviar.
- Prepared meals (eg TV dinners, lasagne, etc).



Coke — is it really the real thing?

Well, it seems so. More than 300 people tasted a range of colas to find out which one's their favourite, and for once it seems the reality matches the ads.



IF YOU'RE THIRSTY AND YOU LIKE SOFT drinks, chances are you'll reach for a COKE. With over 80% of market sales, COCA-COLA is by far the leading brand of cola sold in Australia, and remains *numero uno* of all retail goods, according to the Top 100 Brands listing — for the sixth year running.

What makes us buy it? Certainly not its price: at around \$1 for a 375 mL can, COKE is almost double the price of most other cola brands, and even triple the price of some. Could it be all that slick advertising?

Coca-Cola South Pacific promoters take their advertising seriously — in 1998 they spent an estimated \$28.5 million. So are we getting sucked in by the marketing, or do most of us drink COKE because we really like the taste?

CHOICE decided to check it out with a blind taste test of 10 different colas. We took the colas along to a Sydney shopping centre and asked shoppers and their children over 10 to taste and rate them.

Habit or preference?

COKE's taste was a clear winner for the trialists — both kids and adults: 45% said they 'liked' it or 'liked it a lot' (see the graph, right). It stood out as tasting 'sharp' and not 'artificial' or 'bland'. Still, it's possible some trialists drink COKE out of habit rather than preference: over two thirds of the trialists who tasted COKE said they normally drink it, but in this test only 50% of them said they 'liked' it or 'liked it a lot'; 32% of them thought it was OK. And although it's only based on a small number of people, it's interesting that roughly two out of 10

who normally drink COKE said they didn't like its taste at all.

While COKE beat all the other colas, near the top of the rest of the pack was FIRST CHOICE, which, at the much cheaper price of 54 cents per 375 mL, you might be tempted to try on a thirsty family.

HOME BRAND cola got the lowest score for the combined 'like' and 'like a lot' categories — most thought it tasted 'artificial'.

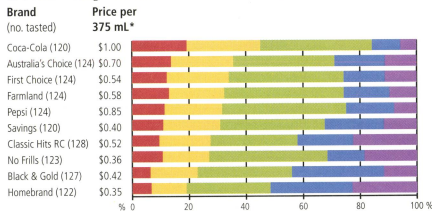
Surprisingly, COKE's major competitor — PEPSI — came only in the middle of the pack.

In general, adults liked colas that they thought were 'fizzy', 'zesty', 'sharp', 'smooth' and 'natural-tasting'. Fizz also mattered to kids (under 16), but beyond liking that and a 'sugary' taste, they weren't as discriminating as the adults.

IN BRIEF

■ While Coke lived up to its market-leading image, it could be worth trying your kids on something cheaper — their palates don't seem to be as discriminating as adults'.

■ Of those who normally drink Coke, not all voted for it, so is buying it sometimes just habit?



* Based on a national price survey in mid July 1999.

All brands were purchased in 375 mL cans from supermarkets, except Classic Hits RC Cola, which was only available in 500 mL bottles.

Red = Like a lot (%) Blue = Dislike (%)
Yellow = Like (%) Purple = Dislike a lot (%)
Green = OK (%)

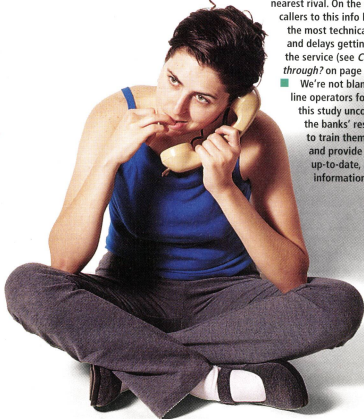
Hanging on the telephone



Banks are closing branches and encouraging customers to use new technology like telephone information services. But some phone services are failing to help. The 'big four' bank info lines gave callers incomplete and incorrect answers to simple questions.

IN BRIEF

- The telephone information services provided by Australia's four major banks gave incorrect or unsatisfactory information to 63% of callers in our questions about credit cards, fees, fee exemptions, retiree accounts and mortgages.
- Callers seeking information for elderly customers or students were more likely than others to get incomplete or inaccurate information.
- Credit where it's due: NATIONAL bank information staff were streets ahead of the opposition, scoring 76% overall, more than 20% ahead of its nearest rival. On the downside, callers to this info line reported the most technical difficulties and delays getting through to the service (see *Can't even get through?* on page 17).
- We're not blaming the info line operators for the failings this study uncovered — it's the banks' responsibility to train them properly and provide them with up-to-date, accurate information.



ONLY 23% OF OUR CALLS TO THE national telephone information services (info lines) of Australia's four largest banks (ANZ, COMMONWEALTH, NATIONAL and WESTPAC) received complete and correct answers to straightforward inquiries. Another 18% received incorrect and/or irrelevant information; and 45% were given some correct information but overall the answers were unsatisfactory.

The remaining 14% of callers got the majority of the facts needed to successfully complete dealings with the bank. Their answers, although incomplete, were considered satisfactory.

Too many callers were told to visit a bank branch to get the information they needed — hardly encouraging when the banks have closed branches and are telling us to use these services instead. It's also unhelpful if the caller is elderly or incapacitated.

Answers from some operators were incomplete and confusing. Callers were sometimes passed on to several different operators before they found one who would even attempt to answer their question. And then they received the wrong information anyway.

Following are the results for the five questions we asked.

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

National	76%
Commonwealth	55%
ANZ	50%
Westpac	45%

The info lines were scored against model answers supplied by the banks themselves — see *The survey*, right, for details. Each bank's overall score (above) represents the percentage of right answers it gave over all five scenarios.

1: What do you offer retirees?

The bank info lines gave particularly poor advice about products for retirees.

The question: "My mother/father is a [self-funded] retiree. Do you have any special rates, discounts or accounts for them?"

The model answers:

- **ANZ:** Yes. Term deposit rate pays extra 0.25% interest for Seniors Card holders with accounts over \$5000.
- **Commonwealth:** No.
- **National:** Yes. Special statement and passbook accounts for retirees over 55, with no account-keeping fees and lower transaction fees.
- **Westpac:** No.

Advice given by bank info lines about accounts and benefits available for self-funded retirees was very poor. The overall average score of the four banks for this question was a low 31%.

It's well known that elderly customers have the greatest reluctance to use new technology, such as phone and Internet banking, so we'd hoped for good service to compensate. They also experience the greatest difficulties due to branch closures and relocations.

A big fat zero

WESTPAC scored zero for this question. All callers were given incorrect answers to their inquiries.

Rather than simply telling callers the bank doesn't have any special accounts or benefits for self-funded retirees, most operators gave what appeared to be a trained response about WESTPAC's various accounts and their advantages. Such information could lead retirees to choose a bank account that's not the best available for them.

I shouldn't tell you this, but...

The ANZ and COMMONWEALTH both scored a disappointing 33% for this scenario.

Two out of six callers to the COMMONWEALTH were given the correct answer to their question — "no". All other operators failed to answer the question correctly.

The ANZ does have something to offer self-funded retirees, so the inability of its operators to give callers the right information is surprising.

For example, one operator said there were no special rates or accounts and even told the caller to try another bank. The caller commented:

"The customer service officer was apologetic and said 'Unfortunately, no!' Then he said, 'I'm not supposed to tell you this, but try the COMMONWEALTH — they have good retiree accounts with no fees'."

Report card: Just not good enough

Banks continue to rationalise their branch networks and push new technology like Internet and phone banking. Consumers continue to pay high fees for the services provided by banks. CHOICE thinks those services should be reliable and accurate.

We asked five questions that cover the basic range of customer groups and banking needs and scored the banks' responses, based on what the bank told us the right response should be.

The info lines of Australia's four major banks gave most of the callers in this study unsatisfactory service. They referred too many customers back to branches and provided too many callers with incorrect and/or incomplete information.

Too many customers encountered difficulties getting through to the service, only to spend time on hold while operators searched for information, double-checked their facts or looked for someone who could answer the caller's question.

This study is only a snapshot of the type of treatment and information consumers receive when they phone their bank for help, but the results indicate help can be very hard to come by.

Australia's four major banks obviously need to improve info line staff training and internal procedures to ensure the advice given to customers is accurate and complete.

The poor current standards must be improved, especially when more vulnerable consumers like the elderly and the young (retirees and students) received the worst advice from the info lines.

Most callers to the NATIONAL received only some of the information set out in the bank's model answer.

1: THE SCORES

National (5 calls)	56%
ANZ (6 calls)	33%
Commonwealth (6 calls)	33%
Westpac (6 calls)	0%

2: Bank fees and exemptions

Students who acted on info line advice could well have misunderstood or missed out on bank fee exemptions.

The question: "My son/daughter is a student. Can they be exempt from account fees?"

The model answers:

- **ANZ:** Yes: an Access account, with account-keeping and transaction fee exemptions. They must be a full-time student; must pay to use another bank's ATM; must show student ID.
- **Commonwealth:** There's a student rebate scheme with the student pack for the Streamline account. Annual credit card fee waived; must prove full-time tertiary status each year.
- **National:** Yes: the National Tertiary Student Package. Must be a full-time student. Exempt from account-keeping and transaction fees but must pay to use another bank's ATM. Must show current ID.
- **Westpac:** Yes: the Classic account, with account-keeping fee exemptions and reduced transaction fees. Must be a full-time student and under 26; must show ID.

The survey

We made 113 calls to the info lines over a period of one month last year. Calls were made at random times throughout the day.

Our callers asked operators a question and recorded their response. Each response was then marked against a model answer supplied by the bank. To score 100% the operator had to provide all the key elements in the model answer.

A score between 75% and 100% was considered satisfactory; scores less than 75% were unsatisfactory.

Scores for each scenario represent the amount of correct information provided by each bank, expressed as a percentage. Although the scores for each scenario are based on a small number of calls (five to seven), we've shown them as percentages because we think info lines should be striving for answers that are 100% correct all the time — 50% isn't good enough.

Only two out of the 23 callers who contacted bank info lines to request information about fee exemptions for students were given 100% correct responses.

In fact, only four other callers received satisfactory answers to their questions; the other 17 were given incomplete, confusing or incorrect information.

Just pop into a branch

Some callers to the NATIONAL info line were told to go to a branch for information about student fee exemptions. With the number of branches declining, this isn't always easy.

However, NATIONAL still achieved the best score out of the four banks for this scenario. Two callers received correct and complete responses to their inquiries, although other NATIONAL operators failed to give callers critical pieces of information, including the need to show ID, to be studying full-time and an explanation of the fees students do and don't have to pay.

ANZ operators also failed to tell callers the whole story about fee exemptions for students.

Time on hold

Three out of six callers to WESTPAC seeking advice on student fee exemptions spent time on hold.

Even the best WESTPAC operator for this scenario placed the caller on hold while she looked for relevant information and was wishy-washy about the exact nature of exemptions available and the account they related to. Other operators failed to explain the various conditions.

One caller had to wait five minutes and 50 seconds before being connected to an operator and then spent another five minutes and 10 seconds talking to customer service representatives.

At one stage she was "transferred to the wrong place and then transferred back to the original

number but to a different person". A simple info line inquiry shouldn't have to become such a complicated process.

Poor inside knowledge

The COMMONWEALTH customer service representatives didn't properly explain the bank's fee rebate scheme for students.

The best response from the COMMONWEALTH provided the caller with only two of the four key pieces of information in the bank's model answer. All the other callers received even less useful data.

2: THE SCORES

National (5 calls)	70%
ANZ (5 calls)	65%
Westpac (6 calls)	54%
Commonwealth (5 calls)	35%

3: Using my credit card overseas

Triple-check your bank's policy on fees for using overseas ATMs before you go on a trip. The major banks gave our callers confusing and inconsistent advice.

The question: "Is there a charge for using an overseas ATM with my Visa card?"

The model answers:

- **ANZ:** Yes. Conversion fee: 0.5% of each transaction; withdrawal fee: \$5.
- **Commonwealth:** Yes. Conversion fee: 1% of each transaction; withdrawal fee: \$4.
- **National:** Yes. Conversion fee: 1% of each transaction; withdrawal fee: \$4.
- **Westpac:** Yes. Conversion fee: 0.5% of each transaction; withdrawal fee: \$1.15.

Do you have the time?

Some callers spent long periods of time waiting to be connected to a customer service representative (see right). Others spent time on hold while the operator looked for information or consulted other bank staff about the correct answer to the caller's question.

On the other hand, some conversations between caller and operator were incredibly short and sharp. This is acceptable if the correct answer is "no". However, for more complex questions, 30 seconds is too short to give the customer the required information.

Time spent on info line calls in our survey

Bank (in alphabetical order)	1	2	Longest time spent waiting	Longest time spent talking
	Average time spent waiting	Average time spent talking		
ANZ (27)*	1½ m	2½ m	3½ m	12½ m
Commonwealth (29)*	1 m	3 m	2¼ m	16 m
National (27)*	3 m	3¼ m	8 m	9½ m
Westpac (30)*	2 m	3¾ m	9 m	9¼ m

* (Number of calls).

1 Average time spent waiting

This is the time taken in minutes (rounded to the nearest 15 seconds) for our callers to get through to a customer service representative from the moment they

dialled the info line number. The times shown are the average achieved by each bank for all five scenarios.

2 Average time spent talking

This is the time the caller spent with a customer service representative, including any time on hold.

The bank info line operators performed a little better when asked to explain how much it would cost to use their bank's Visa card in an overseas ATM.

The average score for the four banks in this scenario was 61%, with the NATIONAL performing significantly better than its three competitors.

Reasonable effort for travellers

In fact, the NATIONAL's 78% score for this scenario was equal third-best for all the banks throughout this exercise. Two calls scored 100%.

The other four customer service representatives told their callers about the transaction fee but didn't mention they'd also have to pay a 1% conversion fee. If callers had based travel plans on that advice, they could have had difficulty keeping track of their Visa account balances or even have run short of funds while travelling.

Conversion fee forgotten

The ANZ info line operators did the second-best job of answering this inquiry. However, none of the six callers was given information about the bank's 0.5% conversion fee.

Fee confusion

Four callers to the COMMONWEALTH were not told about the 1% conversion fee. The operators for two of those calls also gave incorrect information about the amount of the transaction fee. And another caller was told there was no fee for using an overseas ATM apart from the 1% conversion fee.

WESTPAC info line operators gave the worst answers for this scenario. Five callers weren't told about the conversion fee and were given an incorrect transaction fee. Given that the information required by the callers was very basic, it's a disappointing performance.

3: THE SCORES

National (6 calls)	78%
ANZ (6 calls)	67%
Commonwealth (5 calls)	53%
Westpac (7 calls)	45%

4: I'm looking for a flexible home loan

Don't expect impartial, factual guidance when you phone a bank info line for mortgage information. They're in the sales game.

The question: "I'm shopping around for a home loan. I have one at the moment but I'm interested in getting one that has a line of credit. Does your bank have this type of loan? Can you tell me a bit about it?"

Can't even get through?

Callers to the NATIONAL AUSTRALIA BANK info line reported more difficulties and delays getting through to the service than for the other three banks. We considered a delay to be a wait of three minutes or more to reach a customer service representative.

In fact, over half the calls made to the NATIONAL service involved a delay long before the caller was connected with a live operator, and/or other technical problems.

Callers reported:

- Busy tones.
- Strange ringing.
- Long periods with recorded "please hold" instructions.
- Recorded messages about long queues and suggestions to "call back later".

WESTPAC callers had the second-highest number of technical difficulties and delays (seven out of 30 calls). One caller waited an unacceptable nine minutes and four seconds before reaching a live operator. Another was confused by recorded instructions on the service.

There were only two reports of delays and service difficulties for both the ANZ and COMMONWEALTH info lines.

The model answers:

■ **ANZ:** Yes, the ANZ Equity Manager. Interest rate 6.55% (at the time of the study). Fees: \$600 application fee; \$150 pa account service fee.

■ **Commonwealth:** Yes, Home Equity Facility. Interest rate 6.55% (at the time of the study). Fees: \$600 establishment; \$12 monthly service fee.

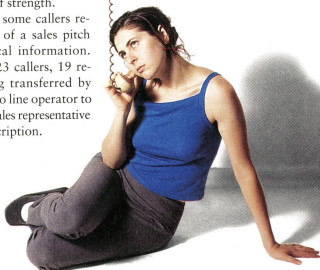
■ **National:** Yes, National Flexi Plus Mortgage. Interest rate: 6.45% (at the time of the study). Fees: \$600 application; \$250 pa account service fee.

■ **Westpac:** Yes, Equity Access. Interest rate: 6.59% (at the time of the study). Fees: \$750 application; \$250 annual service fee.



With the exception of the ANZ, our mortgage question uncovered one of the bank info lines' areas of strength.

However, some callers received more of a sales pitch than practical information. Out of the 23 callers, 19 reported being transferred by the initial info line operator to a mortgage sales representative of some description.



Getting their story right

How could bank info line operators be expected to give callers the right information when the banks' head offices had difficulty supplying CHOICE with correct answers to the questions included in this study?

In order to assess the info lines fairly, we approached the four banks for correct answers to the five questions we wanted to put to their customer service representatives.

We checked the answers given by each bank against information on their websites and in product brochures. To our disappointment, there were inconsistencies and contradictions in the answers supplied by all four banks.

It took a series of phone calls, emails and faxes to each bank to end up with model answers we believe to be correct and complete.

If the banks can't get their acts together to give the correct information to CHOICE, what hope does the average consumer have of being given the correct advice when using an info line?

As a result, some callers were encouraged to make an appointment or even lodge home loan applications based on their conversation with the sales rep.

And some info line operators — even the sales reps — seemed to have very little knowledge about their bank's mortgage products.

Way behind its competitors

The ANZ info line operators gave mostly poor responses to this inquiry about a mortgage with a line of credit. Only one caller was given all the facts in the bank's model answer.

Three ANZ calls scored zero. One info line operator didn't even understand the nature of the question. The caller commented:

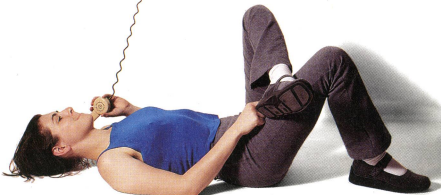
"When asked the question the operator answered, 'A line of credit — what's that? We don't have that. Could you tell me the features it has? Because we might have that but it's called something else'."

A much better effort

NATIONAL and WESTPAC were the top scorers. Most of the tele-sales operators at these two banks gave satisfactory answers. However, some omitted points that were included in each bank's model answer.

For example, NATIONAL operators failed to tell callers fees or the interest rate and one failed to give the correct product name. Half the WESTPAC callers were given all the required facts.

Two calls to the COMMONWEALTH scored 100%. However, one operator was quite pushy, attempting to give the caller a 21-day commitment to finance. Others failed to give some details, such as the correct name of the mortgage, applicable fees, and/or the interest rate.



4: THE SCORES

National (6 calls)	78%
Westpac (5 calls)	78%
Commonwealth (6 calls)	73%
ANZ (5 calls)	38%

5: I want an easy way to pay my credit card

Even a simple inquiry like organising a direct debit tripped up some bank info line operators.

The question: "Can I pay my Visa card by direct debit from my credit union account?"

The model answers:

- **ANZ:** Yes. This service can be set up by the ANZ.
- **Commonwealth:** No.
- **National:** No.
- **Westpac:** Yes. This service can be set up by Westpac.

All callers to the NATIONAL info line were given the correct answer to this question.

On the other hand, one NATIONAL operator was described as: "Not very helpful ... got agitated with me and didn't explain it very well ... it was clear she had had enough of my call and just wanted to end it."

Four out of five callers to the COMMONWEALTH also received the correct response — only one, incorrectly, said yes.

A caller who contacted the COMMONWEALTH made the following comment:

"When I asked the question the operator said, 'Yes, if it is set up for a direct debit, you can.' I asked, 'If what is set up, sorry?' The operator said: 'Well, if you send ... well, you can do a Bpay ... I'm not sure if you can — one moment.' The operator didn't seem to understand what I was asking."

All over the shop

ANZ and WESTPAC were less consistent when it came to answering this question. Some callers were given clear and concise answers, while others were incorrectly told to talk to their credit unions.

5: THE SCORES

National (5 calls)	100%
Commonwealth (7 calls)	80%
ANZ (5 calls)	50%
Westpac (6 calls)	50%



COMPUTING CHOICE

Internet à la carte

*One cappuccino, one short black
Web and a long flat email please.*

INTERNET CAFES AND BOOTHS ARE popping up all over the country, promising access to the wonders of the Internet. Just check your suburb's main street or a nearby shopping centre. If you're considering getting connected, an Internet café could be a good place to get a taste of what's on offer. Here's a brief look at what you can expect to find.

What's on the menu?

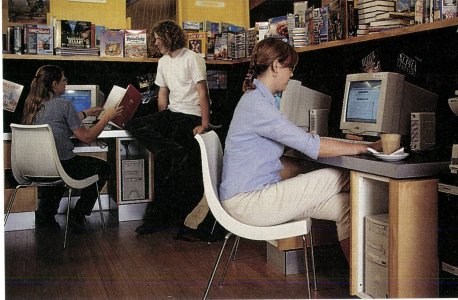
Most will serve you a cup of coffee, some offer food too, but they're not an Internet café if they don't supply a computer and access to the Internet. If there's no coffee or food, an Internet booth or lounge is probably a better name, but it's no less useful if it's just the Internet you're after.

You can expect to pay anything from around \$3 to \$12 an hour and some throw in a free cup of tea or coffee. This should get you access to a computer, the Internet and use of an email program so you can send messages. Internet access usually includes the World Wide Web, FTP, telnet and chat sites as a minimum (see *Internet vs Web*, below, for more on these). Some also give you the option of playing games, either within the café's internal network or over the Internet.

A lot of cafés also offer services like image scanning, permanent email addresses, photo processing, printing, faxing, training and even using their computer for designing and publishing your own Web page. Naturally, each of these services will cost and some can be quite expensive, so shop around before deciding on a café.

Décor

Computer monitors, keyboards and mice all have their place in an Internet café, but that's about where the interior design similarity ends. Some are dressed up like trendy cafés with shiny metal chairs and tables all fresco. Others emphasise a relaxed ambience, or offer music and other entertainment as well as the Internet for the young and young at heart. A growing



number are more interested in utility and offer booths that are more like workstations and may not even have coffee on the menu.

Service

Like the décor, the level of service varies. Those that offer food and coffee will probably have staff who can help you if you need it. The more utilitarian booths are likely to have more technically savvy staff, but in either case it's unlikely anything more than basic advice will be free.

Ask for a list of prices for their different services when you first visit, and always check for specials.

Finding one

If you can't see one in a main street near you, look in the Yellow Pages under Internet Services, advertisements in your local paper, or on the Web — www.netcafeguide.com/frames.html has lists for most countries.

In major cities you'll find a lot of them around tourist areas, where the booth style seems to be more popular, and universities, where there tends to be more emphasis on coffee and entertainment. Look for them in tourist spots outside the major cities too — they can be found from Yankalilla in SA to Cairns in Queensland and Margaret River in WA. □

IN BRIEF

■ If you'd like to try out the Internet — maybe you want to surf the Web or send some emails — you can do it now in the Internet booths and cafés that are springing up in cities and many towns these days.

Internet vs Web

Sometimes the terms Internet and Web are used as if they're the same thing. They're not. The Internet is the combination of all sorts of ways of transferring information. It includes:

- **The Web** — used for transferring pages that can contain text, graphics and sound.
- **Email**.
- **FTP** — File Transfer Protocol lets you transfer files to another computer that's also running FTP software.
- **Telnet** — allows you to connect to another computer as if you were using its keyboard. It's used mainly by business these days, but some libraries may still be using it for searching their catalogues.
- **Chat sites** — offer text-based conversation on specific topics.



The latest on car safety

IN BRIEF

■ Want to buy the safest car you can? Check the ANCAP ratings for new cars (below right) and the real-crash ratings for secondhand vehicles (pages 22–23).

■ Real-crash analysis shows big safety gaps between the best and worst cars: you're four times safer in the five best-rated cars than in the worst five (pages 22–23).

■ The safest passenger cars in the real-crash analysis are the VOLVO 700 Series and HONDA Accord; the least safe are the SUBARU Sherpa, DAIHATSU Handivan and the SUZUKI Hatch (see pages 22–23 for model years). Some 4WDs also rated very highly.

Real-crash analysis shows that, for safety, bigger and newer cars are a good bet. Meanwhile, there's good news for four-wheel-drive enthusiasts in the latest Australian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) tests.

MANUFACTURERS ARE FINALLY taking four-wheel-drive vehicle safety more seriously, judging from the latest round of tests in the Australian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP). Three of the vehicles tested, the TOYOTA Landcruiser, SUBARU Forester and HONDA CR-V, got good overall safety ratings. Last year all four-wheel drives tested were rated marginal or poor.

Only the KIA Sportage, with a poor score for restraints and head and lower leg injury protection, was rated poor overall this time.

The three models with good overall scores were fitted with dual airbags, reinforcing the message of the recent ANCAP tests on large family cars (CHOICE, May 1999): for extra safety, make sure your car's fitted with airbags. Detailed scores are given in the table, right.

Real-crash ratings

The ANCAP tests are a valuable tool for comparing the protection offered by new cars in a simulated

accident. But other factors come into play in a real accident — so how much protection will your car really offer?

A recent study conducted by the Monash University Accident Research Centre (sponsored by the NSW RTA, RACV, NRMA, VicRoads and the Federal Office of Road Safety) looked at 519,000 drivers involved in accidents in Victoria, NSW and Queensland between 1987 and 1997. Crashworthiness ratings were calculated for many cars built between 1982 and 1997; they're listed on pages 22 and 23. If you can't find the car you're interested in, it's probably fairly rare or recent, and hasn't been involved in enough accidents for a meaningful rating.

The results

The general overview comes as no surprise: drivers of large and luxury cars fared better in accidents than those in medium and, worst of all, small cars. For example, drivers of the worst-rating small car, the SUBARU Sherpa, have an 8.2% chance of being seriously injured in an accident. But for those in the worst large car, the HYUNDAI Sonata, the risk is only 3.5%.

This is partly because larger — and more expensive — cars tend to have more safety features. It's also reflected in the ANCAP tests, where bigger cars tend to get better scores.

But it's also the law of physics at work: in a collision between a heavy and a light car, the lighter car will come off worse. This helps to explain why people in the heavier four-wheel-drive vehicles did well in the real crashes: their vehicles are among the heaviest on the road.

Another important factor highlighted by the ratings is the age of your vehicle. With safety features improving every year, it's not surprising the study found later-model cars tend to be more crashworthy. Each version of the HOLDEN Commodore, for example, did much better than its earlier counterpart.

However, there are exceptions — buying an expensive new car won't guarantee your safety, while

Crash testing shows that cars without airbags give the driver and passenger less protection against serious injury.



some older, smaller cars did very well. The crashworthiness rating for the 1982-93 PEUGEOT 505, for example, was far better than that for the 1989-93 HOLDEN Commodore VN/VP.

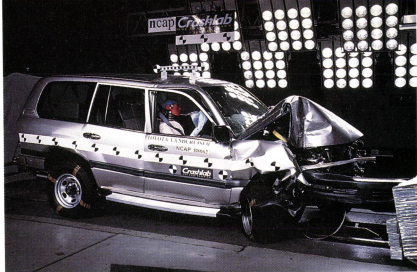
Real-crash results and ANCAP

We'd like to be able to combine the real-crash ratings and the ANCAP test results to give you an authoritative safety audit for each car, but unfortunately we can't.

First, the real-crash study looks only at drivers, while the ANCAP tests consider the front-seat passenger as well. Also, few cars have both ANCAP and real-crash ratings. It's not possible to come up with a real-crash rating for newer cars because there isn't enough accident data for them. Conversely, ANCAP has tested new cars only since 1993, so it's no help with buying older models secondhand.

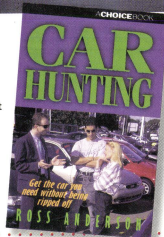
The ANCAP tests also have their limitations: cars are crashed into a barrier, so the tests don't give a good idea of how the car would fare in an accident involving a much larger or smaller car. Unless you carefully crash your Ford Falcon head-on into another Ford Falcon (or at least a car within 230 kg of its weight), these ratings don't give you a very accurate estimate of protection.

Continued overleaf



The latest Toyota Land Cruiser topped the safety ratings for large 4WDs in the latest ANCAP crash tests.

If you're thinking of buying a car, get all the gen on the tricks and traps of the trade in the CHOICE Book, *Car Hunting*. See page 28 to order it.



ANCAP crash test results: new four-wheel drives

This table lets you check how well a 4WD you're interested in fared and compare it to similar vehicles.

For more information on the ratings, see the notes on the last ANCAP test of large cars in CHOICE, May 1999. Crash test results for smaller cars were published in the January/February 1999 issue. If you're a new subscriber and don't have a copy of these, send a stamped, self-addressed, business-sized

envelope marked *Car test* to CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204, and we'll send them to you free of charge. More information on the ANCAP test methods and past tests can also be found at the NRMA website: www.nrma.com.au/motoring/safety/ncap/. Or check out www1.tpgi.com.au/users/mpaine/ncaplist.html for ratings from tests around the world.

ANCAP crash test results

ANCAP crash test results					Protection from serious injury to:				
Make / model (in overall performance order)	Weight (kg)	Structure	Restraint system	Headrest / restraint design	Head	Chest	Upper legs	Lower legs	Overall performance
LARGE FOUR-WHEEL DRIVES									
TOYOTA Landcruiser, 1998-99 (dual airbags)	2450	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
HOLDEN Jackaroo, 1998-99 (dual airbags)	2000	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	X	✓✓
NISSAN Patrol, 1997-99 (driver's airbag)	2410	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	(A)	X	✓
TOYOTA Prado, 1997-99 (no airbags)	2020	✓✓	✓	✓	X	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	X	✓
MEDIUM AND SMALL FOUR-WHEEL DRIVES									
SUBARU Forester, 1998-99 (dual airbags)	1400	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	X	✓✓✓
HONDA CR-V, 1999 (dual airbags)	1500	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓
TOYOTA RAV4, 1997-99 (no airbags)	1330	✓✓	✓	✓	X	✓✓	✓✓✓	X	✓
KIA Sportage, 1997-99 (no airbags)	1510	✓	X	✓✓	X	✓✓	✓✓✓	X	X

(A) The forces experienced in this test were unusual; they weren't of the type the crash dummy is designed to measure.

✓✓✓ = good,
✓✓ = acceptable,
✓ = marginal,
X = poor.



CAR SAFETY

But they tell you the protection your car will offer if, say, you crash into a brick wall, and they help you compare cars within a class of vehicles. So, for example, if you're buying a new small car you can choose the safest model.

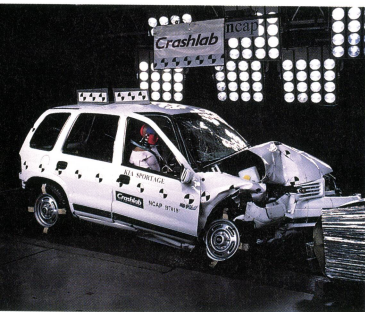
Standing up to scrutiny?

Car manufacturers have questioned the ANCAP tests because they don't reflect a real crash situation, as mentioned above. But a second study by the Accident Research Centre shows that ANCAP ratings can be used to predict real-accident ratings fairly reliably.

The study looked at 28 models for which both ANCAP and real-crash ratings were available. There wasn't a really close relationship between the two sets of raw data. But the ANCAP figures could be adjusted (for example, to account for different vehicles' weight advantages) to give predicted crashworthiness ratings that were close to the real-crash ratings.

The two programs, the report concluded, give "compatible and consistent measures of relative vehicle occupant protection".

Also, the ANCAP tests should soon become more informative. Until now, they've used a head-on crash and an offset crash (where 40% of the vehicle's front on the driver's side is slammed into the barrier), so they don't take account of the level of passenger protection from, for example, a side-on impact. The program is now adopting the European testing model, which includes a side-impact test.



The Kia Sportage was the worst of the tested 4Ws for safety. It offered poor protection from injury to the head and lower legs.

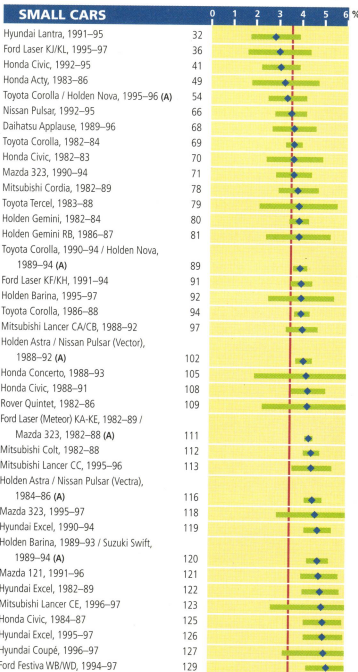
Real-crash ratings: how to read the graphs

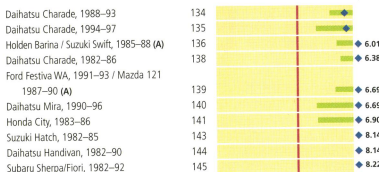
The diamond in the rating bar represents the best estimate of risk — the chance the driver would have of being seriously injured in a crash. So a best estimate of 2.5 means a 2.5% risk of hospitalisation or death following a crash. The bar shows how accurate the estimate is: a short bar indicates a common car, for which there's plenty of information, and an accurate estimate. The red line shows the average rating for all cars rated.

Crashworthiness

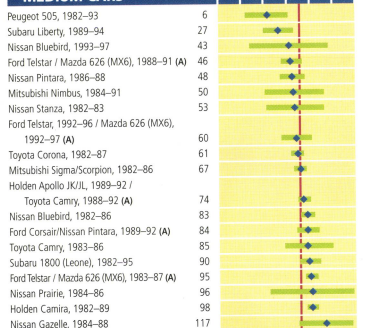
Car make and model, year of manufacture (in overall rank order within groups)

Overall rank order*
Serious injury rate per 100 drivers involved:
♦ = best estimate of risk (%)

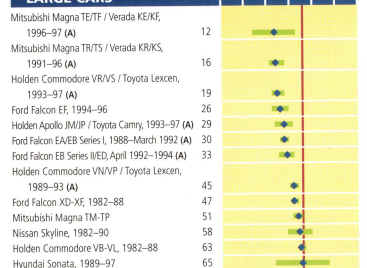




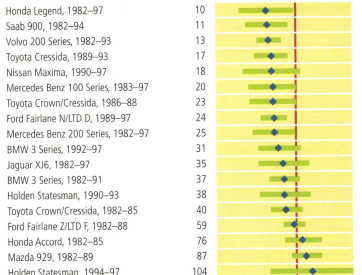
MEDIUM CARS



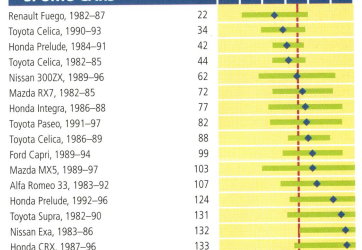
LARGE CARS



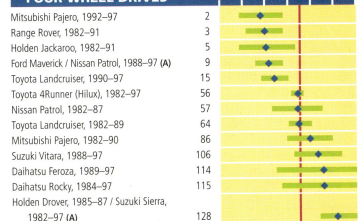
LUXURY CARS



SPORTS CARS



FOUR-WHEEL DRIVES



PASSENGER VANS



* Some ranks are missing because we haven't printed the ratings for commercial vehicles.

(A) These two models are similar, so their results have been combined to give better precision.

The bingle bill blues



A harmless low-speed accident can cost you or your insurer no more than \$2000 to repair if your car is well-designed. So why do other models cost twice as much or more?

IN BRIEF

- Poor design and/or expensive parts mean some repair bills come to as much as one third of the car's purchase price.
- Airbag design in low-speed accidents has improved — none of those tested deployed unnecessarily.
- Low-speed crash tests don't indicate a car's safety — see page 20 for more information on real-life accidents and the safety of four-wheel drives.

HOW EXPENSIVE YOUR CAR IS TO REPAIR has a significant impact on your insurance premium — according to NRMA Insurance, about 60 cents of each insurance dollar go towards crash repairs, so repair costs are an important consideration when determining premiums.

But how do they know the likely range of costs? Each year the insurer takes a number of new models on the market and crashes a pendulum device into the front right-hand corner, simulating a 15 km/h crash into a fixed barrier or a collision into the rear of another car at about 30 km/h. NRMA technicians assess the resulting damage.

For models tested in previous years but still available, repair costs are updated using current labour and parts costs.

The insurer seeks three outcomes from the test:

- To help determine the insurance premiums for the tested models.
- To encourage manufacturers to keep prices of spare parts low — they can make up more than 75% of the total repair bill (see the table, right, for details).

■ To reveal design weaknesses that can be rectified when a new version of the model is on the drawing board.

These test results don't provide any safety information: safety aspects are tested at much higher speeds in the Australian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) — see page 20 for the results for 4WDs.

Recreational 4WDs

Thanks to generous crush spaces, which reduce the number of damaged parts, the HONDA HR-V and MITSUBISHI Pajero iO cost less than \$3000 to repair.

The SUBARU Outback had the third-lowest repair bill — only 9% of its comparatively high purchase price.

At the other end of the scale, damage to a number of expensive parts drove the repair bills of the TOYOTA RAV4, HONDA CR-V and DAIHATSU Terios to more than \$5000 — in the case of the DAIHATSU that's about 25% of its purchase price.

Other cars

The biggest improvement from last year was for the medium-size SUBARU Liberty. Design changes (for example, an improved bumper bar) cut almost \$3000, or 45%, off its repair bill.

The FORD Festiva and FORD Mondeo both benefited from a decrease in parts prices by over \$500, reducing the repair bills by 11% and 9% respectively.

The repair bills for most of the other models have remained largely unchanged. The HONDA Civic and FORD Falcon are still the outstanding models, with bills around the \$2000 mark.

Improved airbag design

Airbags are important safety devices that can prevent serious or even fatal injuries by stopping the driver's or passenger's head from hitting the steering wheel or dashboard. A driver's airbag is available on all the tested models, a passenger's airbag on 25 of the 30 models. However, while airbags are standard equipment on some cars, they're only available as an extra or on top-of-the-range versions of others.

But airbags are only one part of a car's safety system. In a low-speed accident the seat, seatbelt and headrest are generally sufficient to prevent injury, and a deploying airbag doesn't necessarily offer additional protection. But it's expensive to replace, so it's undesirable for an airbag to trigger in low-speed accidents. CHOICE is pleased to see that, unlike in previous years, all the tested models have well-designed airbags that didn't deploy in the bingle. □

1999 low-speed crash test results

1

Repair costs:

Make / model (ranked according to total repair costs, within groups)	Purchase price (\$)*	Labour (\$)*	Parts (\$)* (A)	Total (\$)*	% of purchase price	Change compared to 1998
RECREATIONAL 4WDs						
HONDA HR-V 1.6 L, 2-door, manual	21,950	805	1947	2752	12.5	Not tested in 1998
MITSUBISHI Pajero iO 1.8 L, 4-door, manual	29,890	1211	1752	2963	9.9	Not tested in 1998
SUBARU Outback 2.5 L, 4-door, automatic	39,490	1416	2150	3566	9.0	Not tested in 1998
SUZUKI Grand Vitara (Aust) 2.5 L, 4-door, automatic (B)	32,950	1823	1832	3655	11.1	Not tested in 1998
SUZUKI Grand Vitara (Ateco) 2.5 L, 4-door, automatic (B)	31,950	1823	1927	3750	11.7	Not tested in 1998
KIA Sportage 2.0 L, 4-door, manual	23,990	1556	3079	4635	19.3	Not tested in 1998
SUBARU Forester GX 2.0 L, 5-door, manual	28,940	1014	3646	4660	16.1	Not tested in 1998
LAND ROVER Freelander XEi 1.8 L, 5-door, manual	36,950	1088	3684	4772	12.9	Not tested in 1998
DAIHATSU Terios DX 1.3 L, 4-door, manual	19,618	1461	3622	5083	25.9	Not tested in 1998
HONDA CR-V 2.0 L, 4-door, manual	29,950	1089	4252	5341	17.8	Not tested in 1998
TOYOTA RAV4 2.0 L, 5-door, manual	30,092	1488	4089	5577	18.5	Not tested in 1998
SMALL						
DAEWOO Lanos SE, 1.5 L, 3-door, manual, hatch	14,750	1558	2027	3585	24.3	✓
DAIHATSU Sirion, 1.0 L, 5-door, manual, hatch	13,495	1455	2907	4362	32.3	✗
FORD Festiva Trio, 1.3 L, 3-door, manual, hatch	14,719	1673	2741	4414	30.0	✓✓
MITSUBISHI Mirage, 1.5 L, 3-door, manual, hatch	17,990	1540	3034	4574	25.4	✗
MAZDA 121 Metro, 1.5 L, 5-door, manual, hatch	17,990	1770	3429	5199	28.9	✗
HOLDEN Barina City, 1.4 L, 3-door, manual, hatch	16,360	1837	3536	5373	32.8	✗
SMALL TO MEDIUM						
HONDA Civic GLi, 1.6 L, 3-door, manual, hatch	25,950	683	1218	1901	7.3	✓
MITSUBISHI Lancer GLi, 1.5 L, 2-door, manual, coupe	18,490	1540	2662	4202	22.7	✗
NISSAN Pulsar LX, 1.6 L, 4-door, manual, sedan	19,990	1504	3518	5022	25.1	✓
HOLDEN Astra City, 1.8 L, 5-door, manual, hatch	22,860	1220	4319	5539	24.2	✗
MAZDA 323 Protégé, 1.6 L, 4-door, manual, sedan	20,990	1669	4051	5720	27.3	✗
MEDIUM						
TOYOTA Camry CSI, 2.2 L, 4-door, automatic, sedan	29,385	1288	1890	3178	10.8	✓
SUBARU Liberty RX, 2.5 L, 4-door, automatic, sedan	37,990	1453	1993	3446	9.1	✓✓✓
MAZDA 626 Classic, 2.0 L, 4-door, automatic, sedan	32,430	1350	2621	3971	12.2	✗
HOLDEN Vectra GL, 2.2 L, 4-door, automatic, sedan	28,790	1673	3518	5191	18.0	✗
FORD Mondeo LX, 2.0 L, 4-door, automatic, sedan	26,300	1721	3835	5556	21.1	✓
LARGE						
FORD Falcon Forte, 4.0 L, 4-door, automatic, sedan	30,690	820	1181	2001	6.5	✓
MITSUBISHI Magna Executive 3.5 L, 4-door, automatic, sedan	29,990	1181	1530	2711	9.0	✓
HOLDEN Commodore Executive, 3.8 L, 4-door, automatic, sedan	32,690	1429	1692	3121	9.5	✗
HONDA Accord, 3.0 L, 4-door, automatic, sedan	43,950	1507	2341	3848	8.8	✓

1 Change compared to 1998

This shows how repair costs for each model have changed since the 1998 test:

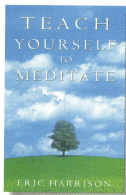
- ✗✗ Increased by more than 10%.
- ✗ Increased by up to 10%.
- ✓ Unchanged or decreased by less than 10%.
- ✓✓ Decreased by 10–20%.
- ✓✓✓ Decreased by more than 20%.

* Prices as in September 1999 and rounded to the nearest dollar. Purchase price includes air conditioning and power steering where available. Air conditioning was regarded as standard equipment on some models that have had extended marketing deals.

(A) List price plus 17.5% mark-up.

(B) Suzuki cars are imported and distributed by a number of companies, resulting in different states getting cars with different specifications, purchase and parts prices. Aust = Suzuki Australia. Ateco = Ateco Suzuki.

Source: NRMA Insurance, 1999.



Teach Yourself to Meditate

This popular book contains a series of meditation exercises you can dip into or do in sequence—all of which can help you overcome the stresses of everyday life.

\$20 Code: TYTM



TV-free Activities for Kids

When the TV is full of sport and the kids don't want to go out again, *TV-free Activities for Kids* has lots of fun ideas that don't need a TV or computer. A key, to let you know the correct age group,

what's needed, whether a parent need supervise and if there is a learning outcome, accompanies each activity.

\$15 Code: TVFA



Making the Internet Work for Your Business

If you have a business, chances are you'll need some sort of involvement with the Internet, but what level of involvement is best? This book explains the Internet for

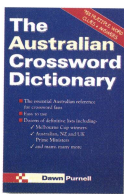
business, and how you can use it in your business. It includes practical advice on topics like promotion, marketing and boosting Internet sales.

\$25 Code: MIWB

The Australian Crossword Dictionary

Got some free time to lounge about doing a crossword in the summer sun, or has a rainy day caught you inside with a newspaper? Either way, if you're stumped for a clue you should be able to get help from this dictionary.

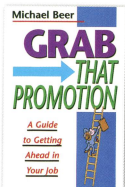
\$13 Code: ACD



Grab That Promotion

A new year has just started—where do you want to be professionally by the end of it? If your answer is higher up at the same company, you should read *Grab That Promotion*. Improving your career needn't mean changing employers.

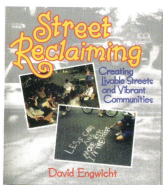
\$20 Code: GTP



Backyard Self-sufficiency

This is a book full of practical ideas and advice for getting the most out of your garden. It includes a planting calendar, information about box gardens and backyard animals, and a suggested list of vegetable planting to keep you in vegies all year round.

\$17 Code: BYSS



Street Reclaiming

Start the New Year right—do what you can to make your living environment safer and more enjoyable.

Street Reclaiming is based on the real-life knowledge of the author in turning urban environments into safer, healthier and happier living environments.

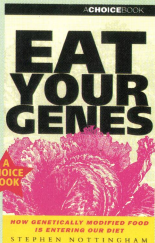
\$25 Code: SREC

Looking out for your health

Eat Your Genes

Genetically modified food is making its way into Australian food and diets. This British book examines how GM food has made it onto the market so quickly and quietly. Find out the background to this important issue.

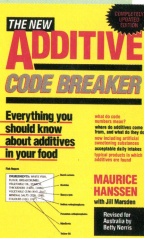
\$25 Code: EYG

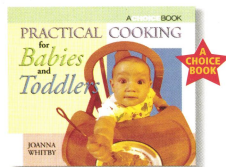


The New Additive Code Breaker

When you read the labels of your latest food purchases, do you ever wonder what those numbers mean? The new *Additive Code Breaker* explains what they are, what they do, how much you need and how much is safe. Be informed about what you eat.

\$17 Code: NACB





Practical Cooking for Babies and Toddlers

When you're in a hurry and want to feed the baby and the rest of your family with little fuss, *Practical Cooking for Babies and Toddlers* could be the answer. Simple yet satisfying recipes that require a minimum number of ingredients and steps to create tasty family meals.

\$20 Code: PCFB

How to Clean Practically Anything

If it can get dirty, this book will help you find the best way to clean it.

It includes a useful cleaning calendar to help you schedule those less than pleasant jobs (when did you last clean your windows?), two stain removal charts and, for those lucky enough, advice about finding a professional cleaner.

\$17 Code: HCPA

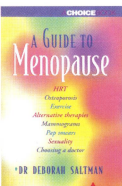


A CHOICE BOOK

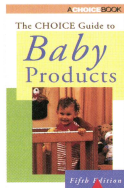
A Guide to Menopause

Each year tens of thousands of women in Australia start their menopause. This book not only explains what's happening to their bodies but what they can do about it and where they can go for help if they need it.

\$18 Code: AGTM



A CHOICE BOOK



A CHOICE BOOK

The CHOICE Guide to Baby Products

If you, a family member or a friend are having a baby, you shouldn't even think about going shopping for baby products without looking at the practical advice in *The CHOICE Guide to Baby Products*. This fifth edition includes information from CHOICE tests of cots and nappies as well as valuable advice on many other products.

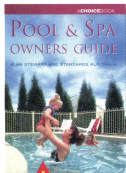
\$17 Code: CGBP

Pool & Spa Owners Guide

If you have a pool or spa, keeping it running efficiently and cleanly shouldn't be a torture, nor should it be a mystery — and if you read *The Pool and Spa Owners Guide* it won't be.

This book not only explains what you have to do to keep your pool or spa running well, but also provides advice to help you get the right pool for your site and what you need to know about the Australian Standards for pools, spas and pool fencing.

\$25 Code: PSOG

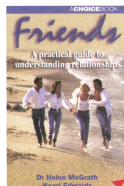


A CHOICE BOOK

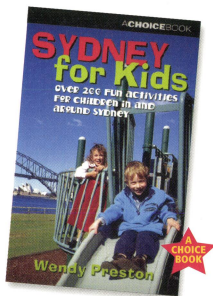
Friends

Some of the most enduring and rewarding relationships we experience are with our friends. This book, written by two friends, will help you to examine, improve and initiate friendships.

\$17 Code: FREN



A CHOICE BOOK



A CHOICE BOOK

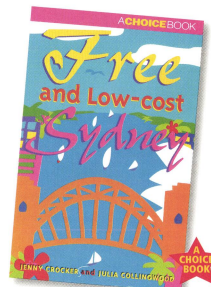
Sydney for Kids

If you're in Sydney for the school holidays, a copy of *Sydney For Kids* could be exactly what you need.

This book has over 200 fun activities to do in and around Sydney, with special consideration given to 'the essentials' when going out with children: how far to walk; where's the toilet; and where and what's to eat.

You're bound to find something to appeal to the children in your life!

\$15 Code: SFK



A CHOICE BOOK

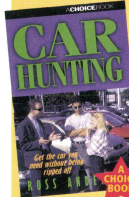
Free & Low-cost Sydney

You'll be surprised by how many free and low-cost options you have for entertainment in Sydney.

Ever thought of attending a university lecture or a court trial; or what about going to a museum of Egyptian antiquities or a poetry reading? These and many other exciting and bizarre activities are listed in this wonderful book of free and low-cost things to do and see in Sydney.

\$15 Code: FLCS

All about cars ...



Car Hunting

Buying a car is full of traps. To make sure you aren't fooled you need to know all the tricks and traps of the car trade. *Car Hunting* offers the reader sure-fire tips to get the best deal available.

\$16 Code: CARH

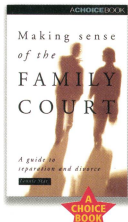
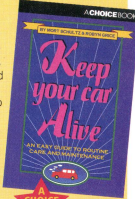
Keep Your Car Alive

Keep Your Car Alive explains in lay terms how a car works and what simple steps you can take to keep yours running more efficiently, for as long as possible.

"I really couldn't find anything they missed." *The Age*

\$16 Code: KYCA

Buy both as a set for \$27
Save \$5
(Code: AUTO)



Making Sense of the Family Court

Unfortunately, at some point, many Australian families will need to use the Family Court. This easy-to-read guide to the Family Court, its systems and forms, will help make the experience a little less traumatic.

\$15 Code: MSFC



Facefacts

If you've ever wondered about what you're putting on your skin or hair, *Facefacts* has the answer. What are AHAs? What gives your hair more 'body'? What's a surfactant? Read *Facefacts* and you'll know.

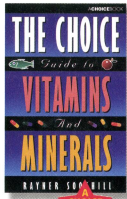
\$18 Code: FF

The CHOICE Guide to Vitamins and Minerals

How much vitamin C do you need? Can you get too much? Will it stop a cold or perhaps cure one faster?

If you'd like to know the answer to these and a range of other questions about vitamins and minerals, such as their daily RDIs and their best food sources, you'll find them in this easy-to-read book.

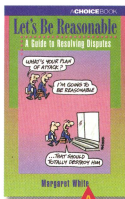
\$18 Code: CGVM



Let's Be Reasonable

Before a dispute reaches the law courts there are a number of alternative dispute resolution techniques you can use to resolve it. *Let's Be Reasonable* presents these options and can help you with negotiations, mediation and, if necessary, the ins and outs of litigation.

\$15 Code: LBR



Order Form

Code	Title	Qty	Item price	Total price

Plus postage and handling (\$4 for one item plus \$1.50 for each extra item)

Total

Send your payment to: Australian Consumers' Association,
57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204 • Phone (02) 9577 3399 • Fax (02) 9577 3355
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Some books may have to be sent separately to keep postage costs down. Please allow 2 to 3 weeks for delivery. If any order cannot be filled for a substantial length of time, we'll let you know and give you the option of cancellation.

CB/0002

Prices are only valid for orders received by 30/6/2000.

IN BRIEF

- If you're into home theatre or have always been unhappy with the picture quality of video tape, a DVD player may be for you.
- The 11 models tested produce very good picture and sound quality.
- DVD players have a confusing number of features and functions. Make sure you get the ones you want, but don't pay for those you won't use.
- Computer DVD-ROM drives also allow you to play movie DVDs and watch them on the monitor (see *Computer CHOICE*, July/August 1999).



DVD players

There's a new player on the home entertainment stage.

Digital versatile disc (DVD) technology promises a picture quality never seen before. So how did eleven DVD players perform on test?

WHAT? YOU HAVEN'T HEARD about DVD players with a built-in AC-3 decoder and pseudo-PAL TV picture in letterbox format? Well, let's start at the beginning, then.

What's DVD?

DVD (digital versatile disc) is a relatively new home entertainment medium, mainly for playing digitally recorded movies. It's not widespread and is still quite expensive.

The 'digital' promises very high picture and sound quality, while the 'versatility' of both the discs and players is no exaggeration. For example:

■ A DVD can store a lot more images and sound than a video tape. For example, one disc can provide different versions of the same movie: you might be able to choose between home-theatre-quality soundtracks in several languages, and subtitles in even more (see *Surrounded by sound*, *CHOICE*, January 1997, for more on home theatre). Or the recording of a major sports event might allow you to choose from several different camera angles to watch the action.

■ DVD players can also play audio CDs and video-discs. Some can even handle recordable CDs (CD-R) and rewritable CDs (CD-RW) — see note 1, page 35, for details.

■ The DVD is the same size as an audio CD but can store much more information — up to eight hours of video/audio, depending on the type (discs can have up to two layers of information on each side, with one layer holding about two hours of video).

Limitations

There are some limitations to DVD versatility:

■ **Playback only** : DVD players won't replace VCRs for some time to come because you currently can't record from your TV onto DVD.

WHAT TO BUY

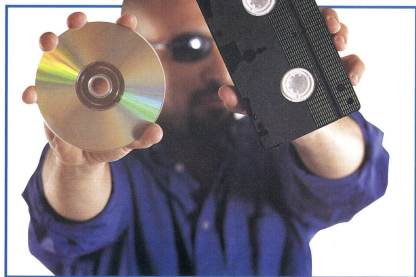
DENON DVD-2500	\$1420
SONY DVP-S725	\$1299
PANASONIC DVD-A160A	\$799
SONY DVP-S525	\$999
SONY DVP-S7700	\$2349
TOSHIBA SD-K320	\$1299



■ **Discs:** Picture quality and, to a certain extent, versatility and ease of use are determined by the disc. The best DVD player can't improve a badly recorded or encoded disc. And while the player may support various soundtracks, subtitles, camera angles and onscreen menus, it relies on all these options being present on the disc.

■ **Regional codes:** The movie industry is dominated by the big Hollywood-based companies, and they usually release movies at different times in different countries. For example, a

DVDs are a step ahead of video tape for picture and sound quality, but you can't record onto them.



movie may already have come out on video (tape or DVD) in the US but just started showing in European cinemas. To protect the cinema market worldwide from video imports, movie studios and distributors have come to an agreement with DVD manufacturers that the DVD system include a code designed to make certain discs unusable in certain geographical areas.

Each machine is given a code for the region in which it's sold, and it won't play discs that aren't coded for that region. So discs bought in one country may not play on a player bought in another country — very important if you're thinking of buying a player or discs overseas.

There are six global regional codes, with Australia being in region four (together with New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, Central and South America and the Caribbean).

The code given to the player is also part of the disc's software, and it's up to the owner of the movie to use it. For example, some older movies put onto DVD aren't encoded and can be played on any player. Some players can be modified to play discs regardless of their regional codes (you may find instructions on the Internet), but this usually voids their warranty.

■ **Copy protection:** Movie DVDs usually activate a copy protection system in the DVD player that prevents you from copying the movie onto video tape. This protection system can be deactivated, but by doing so you're likely to void the warranty, and by copying movies you may breach copyright laws.

Common features

Player

- Single disc drawer.
- Drawer closes automatically at a touch.
- Sockets:
 - Video out: at least one standard video and one S-VHS (see *How to connect the player*, page 33, for details).
 - Audio out: at least one stereo output, except the **AKAI DV-P2000**. At least one digital output (optical and/or coaxial).
 - Supports AC-3 and MPEG-2 audio formats (see page 33 for what this means).
 - Parental lock (allows you to block certain scenes of a movie or whole movies).
 - Skip buttons.
 - At least one search speed for CDs and DVDs, except the **SONY DVP-S7700** (which has search functions on the remote only).

Display

- Can be dimmed, except the **TOSHIBA SD-K320** and **PHILIPS DVD725**.
- **CD mode**
 - Total time.
 - Total number of audio tracks.
 - Remaining time of CD (except **AKAI DV-P2000**).
 - Time of current track.
 - Number of current track.
- **DVD mode**
 - Number of current track.
 - Play time (except the **PIONEER DV-717**).
 - Remaining time of disc, except the **AKAI DV-P2000**, **DENON DVD-2500**, **JVC XV-D705GD** and **PANASONIC DVD-A160A**.

Remote

- Play, stop, pause, skip.
- Buttons for camera angle / subtitles / audio (audio except the **JVC XV-D705GD**).
- At least two search speeds for DVD and CD,

except the **AKAI DV-P2000** which has only one CD speed.

CD mode

- Programming (at least 16 tracks, with last entry deletable).
- Singles can be played without adaptor.
- Random play.
- Search: all speeds with sound (except the **PHILIPS DVD725**).
- Repeat programmed selection (except the **AKAI DV-P2000**), track, whole disc and any selected part (called A-B repeat).

DVD mode

- Still picture.
- Slow motion forward.
- Slow motion backward, except the **PHILIPS DVD725**.
- Repeat of any selected scene (called A-B repeat) and title.



DENON DVD-2500

Target price: \$1420

Good points

- Equal-best picture quality.
- Equal-easiest to use.
- Very fast DVD forward search.
- Versatile in CD mode.
- Easy to disassemble for repair or recycling.

Bad points

- Relatively poor CD error correction.
- User manual could be better.
- No built-in AC-3/MPEG-2 decoder, so you need a separate AC-3/MPEG-2 amplifier or receiver if you want digital home theatre sound.
- No jog dial on the player or remote control (see note 2, page 35).



PANASONIC DVD-A160A

Target price: \$799

Good points

- Equal-easiest to use.
- Very fast DVD forward search.
- Easy to disassemble for repair or recycling.

Bad points

- No headphone connection.
- Relatively poor CD error correction.
- Relatively sensitive to vibrations.
- Relatively poor CD versatility.
- No jog dial on the player or the remote control.
- No built-in AC-3/MPEG-2 decoder.



SONY DVP-S7700

Target price: \$2349

Good points

- Equal-best sound quality.
- Very good CD error correction.
- Very insensitive to vibrations.
- Versatile in CD mode.
- Illuminated play, stop and pause buttons on the player.
- Jog dial on the remote control.

Bad points

- Relatively slow DVD fast forward search.
- Picture quality score not as high as most others, mainly due to poor still picture.
- Relatively poor DVD error correction.
- No built-in AC-3/MPEG-2 decoder.
- Not easy to disassemble for repair or recycling.



SONY DVP-S725

Target price: \$1299

Good points

- Good CD error correction.
- Very easy to set up and use.
- Very versatile in DVD mode.
- Built-in AC-3/MPEG-2 decoder.
- Jog dial on the player and remote control.

Bad points

- Relatively slow DVD fast forward search.
- Not easy to disassemble for repair or recycling.



SONY DVP-S525

Target price: \$999

Good points

- Very versatile in DVD mode.
- Built-in AC-3/MPEG-2 decoder.

Bad points

- Relatively slow DVD fast forward search.
- Relatively poor headphone output signal.
- Relatively sensitive to vibrations.
- No jog dial on the remote control.
- Not easy to disassemble for repair or recycling.



TOSHIBA SD-K320

Target price: \$1299

Good points

- Equal-best picture quality.
- Very versatile in DVD mode.
- Built-in AC-3/MPEG-2 decoder.
- Two microphone connections and pitch-transpose function for karaoke.
- Jog dial on the remote control.

Bad points

- Relatively slow DVD fast forward search.
- Relatively poor headphone output signal.
- Relatively poor CD error correction.

For the technically minded ...

1 Our test

The 11 DVD players were part of an international joint test run by consumer organisations.

Picture quality

The quality of the DVD players' decoding and playback is standardised, so even the best player can't improve the picture from a badly recorded disc.

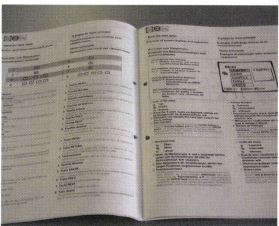
The tests used high-quality discs, and the viewing panel gave all the players 'very good' marks in normal play mode — this was reinforced by the technical video tests.

However, there were some differences in special play modes that depend on the player, rather than the disc's recording quality:

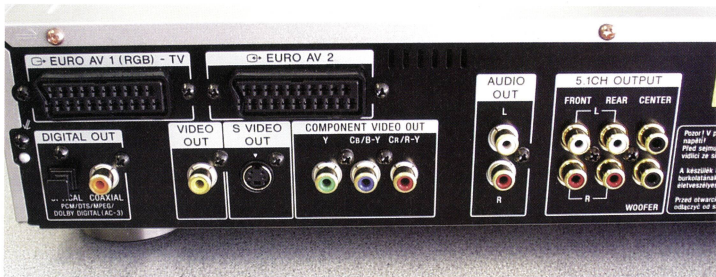
■ **Still picture**: The PHILIPS DVD725 and SONY DVP-S7700 showed some trembling.

■ **Fast forward search**: With video tape, this is done by winding the tape faster than playback speed,

The Pioneer's user manual (right) is confusing, which isn't good enough with new, complex technology.



Clearly labelled sockets (below) are a great help when hooking up your player (see *How to connect the player*, right, for details).



while DVD players jump through a series of still frames. On the SONY DVP-S525 and DVP-S725 the frame jumps are bigger than on the other players, so the search picture doesn't appear as fluent.

The PIONEER DV-717 is the only player in the test with only one search speed.

■ **Slow motion**: Most of the players in the test have forward and backward slow motion. The forward slow motion on the PIONEER DV-717 isn't as smooth as on the other models.

Sound quality

One of the main uses of DVD players is as part of a home theatre system. So the listening panel assessed the sound quality when connected to a full surround-sound system.

The sound quality of all the players tested was very good, with the JVC XV-D705GD scoring slightly lower than the others due to its relatively weak bass.

However, they can't match a good-quality CD player in some other respects. For example, they can lack some display information and search features, take longer to find particular tracks, and they're sometimes less sophisticated in correcting for damaged discs. Some also produce more mechanical noise, which is annoying if you're listening to relatively quiet music such as some classical pieces (AKAI DV-P2000 and PHILIPS DVD725).

Convenience / ease of use

Most of the tested DVD players are designed to be operated via the remote control. Only the JVC XV-D705GD, SONY DVP-S725 and SONY DVP-S525 also have nearly all functions on the player itself. So it's very important that the remote is easy to use. None of those tested is perfect in this regard. The AKAI DV-P2000, JVC XV-D705GD and PHILIPS DVD725 rated worse than the others due to their poor

layout, jog dial operation and button labelling, respectively.

Any new technology, particularly one with so many features and functions, needs an easy-to-understand **user manual**. The PIONEER DV-717 manual rated 'poor', as instructions in several languages are presented confusingly next to each other (see photo, far left). The other manuals didn't have significant weaknesses.

We found big differences in **access and search times**. For example, searching for a scene 90 minutes from the start took from 30–40 seconds (AKAI DV-P2000, DENON DVD-2500 and PANASONIC DVD-A160A) to more than four minutes (PIONEER DV-717).

2 How to connect the player

Most DVD players have several of the following video and audio output options (see the photo, below left), which should allow you to connect them to your existing TV and stereo equipment even if it's not state-of-the-art. However, keep in mind that you need appliances of reasonable quality to fully appreciate the advantages of DVD.

Video

You can get pictures from a DVD player onto your TV in any of the following ways. You need to know what inputs your TV has so that you can decide which to use.

■ Component video

There are two different systems: YUV, where the video signal is transmitted via three separate outputs; and RGB, where the signal is transmitted via a 20-pin SCART connector (a type of socket you may know from computer equipment). Your TV needs the appropriate inputs.

■ S-VHS

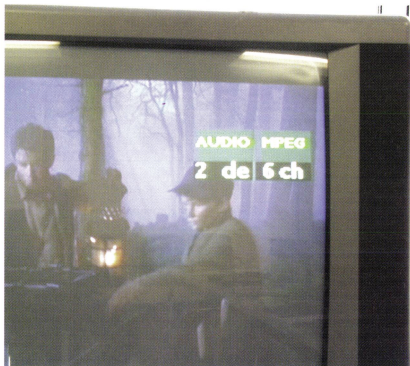
The video signal is transmitted via a single S-video cable to a suitable TV.

■ Composite video

The video signal is transmitted via a standard video cable, which should be suitable for most TVs. If your TV doesn't have a direct video input, it's probably too old to take advantage of the technology: connecting a DVD player to your TV via the VCR (RF connection) is likely to cause problems because of the copy protection (see page 30).

Audio

Newly released movies on DVD usually come with a six-channel home theatre soundtrack (there are two formats: AC-3/Dolby Digital and MPEG-2; see note 3, page 35). DVD players can pass this on as a digital signal or translate it into an analogue signal — depending on what you connect them to.



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■ Digital

If you have a receiver with an AC-3/MPEG-2 decoder, which decodes the signal and feeds it to the six speakers, connect the player to this. The sound signal is transmitted digitally via a coaxial or optical audio output.

■ Component analogue

Some DVD players have an internal AC-3/MPEG-2 decoder and a six-channel analogue output. You can connect these to the six inputs of an 'AC-3/Dolby Digital ready' receiver or amplifier, which then amplifies the signal to the speakers.

■ Stereo analogue

Any AC-3/MPEG-2 soundtrack will also be automatically 'downmixed' to an analogue stereo output with Dolby Surround (Pro-Logic) encoding. You can connect these outputs to your TV, stereo or Dolby Pro-Logic system.

Make sure the player clearly shows you which language and audio format you've selected.

3 TV options

Systems

There are two main TV systems: PAL (which is used in Australia and most of Europe and sends a 50 Hz signal) and NTSC (which is used in the US and Japan and sends a 60 Hz signal).

DVD players sold in Australia can read both systems. So, if they don't have the limitation of a regional code (see page 30), you can buy DVD titles, say, in the US and play them on your Australian DVD player. This will provide one or both of the following output signal options (check which of them your TV can handle before you buy a DVD):

■ True NTSC, in which case you need a multi-standard TV that can switch between both systems.

Continued overleaf



DVD PLAYERS

BEST BUY

equal

equal

Brand / model (in rank order)	Manufacturer / distributor	Origin	Warranty (years)	Target price (\$) *	Dimensions (W x H x D; mm) **	Weight (kg) ***	Headphone socket	Can play recordable CD / rewritable CD	Jog dial on play remote
DENON DVD-2500 (A)	Denon / AWA	Japan	2	1420	430 x 95 x 280	3.5	✓	- / ✓	- / -
SONY DVP-S725	Sony	Japan	ns	1299	430 x 95 x 295	4.1	✓	- / ✓	✓ / ✓
PANASONIC DVD-A160A	Panasonic	Japan	1	799	430 x 90 x 270	3.2		- / ✓	- / -
SONY DVP-5525	Sony	Japan	ns	999	430 x 95 x 295	3.4	✓	- / ✓	✓ / -
SONY DVP-S7700	Sony	Japan	ns	2349	430 x 110 x 315	6.9	✓	✓ / -	- / ✓
TOSHIBA SD-K320	Toshiba / Castel	Japan	1	1299	430 x 80 x 310	3.7	✓	- / ✓	- / ✓
TOSHIBA SD 2109	Toshiba / Castel	Japan	1	799	430 x 80 x 310	3.1		- / ✓ (B)	- / -
AKAI DV-P2000 (A)	Akai	Japan	ns	999	430 x 85 x 330	3.5	✓	- / -	✓ / -
JVC XV-D705GD	Hagemeyer	China	3	1195	435 x 110 x 335	4.5	✓	- / ✓ (B)	✓ / -
PIONEER DV-717	Pioneer	Japan	1	1425	420 x 125 x 370	6.6		✓ / ✓	- / ✓
PHILIPS DVD725	Philips	Singapore	ns	940	435 x 80 x 325	3.6	✓	✓ / ✓	- / -

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in October 1999.

** Rounded to the nearest 5 mm.

*** Rounded to the nearest 0.1 kg. Not including remote control.

ns Not stated.

(A) According to the manufacturer, this model has been discontinued. However, some stock may still be available.

(B) It did this in our test, even though the manual said it wasn't possible.

■ **Pseudo-PAL** (basically a PAL signal, but at 60 Hz), requiring a TV that can handle 60 Hz signals (most modern TVs can).

Picture formats

Have you ever wondered why some movies have black bars at the top and bottom when viewed on TV? It's because they're recorded in a wider format than that of a normal TV, which has a ratio of width to height of 4:3. So if the movie is displayed in full width, it doesn't fill the height of the TV — and the black bars have to make up for it.

A TV has a fixed number of lines to display an image. Using some of them to show black bars leaves less to display the actual movie — the picture is less sharp. You need a modern wide-screen TV with a ratio of 16:9 to get a sharper, bar-free picture.

DVD players offer four playback modes for video:

■ Full frame (4:3 video)

If a movie has been stored in 4:3 format, the player displays the picture unchanged on a standard TV. For a wide-screen TV, it either enlarges the picture or adds black bars to the sides.

■ Wide-screen (16:9 video for 16:9 display)

Wide-screen video can be stored on DVD in 'anamorphic' form, which means the wide-screen picture is squeezed and stretched into 4:3 format without any bars. If you watched an anamorphic video on a standard TV, the picture would look distorted (for example, people would have weird proportions).

If you have a wide-screen TV (or a standard one you can switch into 16:9 mode), you can select this from an onscreen menu. The DVD player will then stretch the picture back to a 16:9 ratio, so you can watch the movie in its original format and sharpness.

■ Letterbox and pan&scan (16:9 video for 4:3 display)

If you select from the menu that you have a standard TV, the DVD player offers the following options:

— **Letterbox**: The player stretches the movie to its original format, and displays it in full width, but less sharply and with black bars on the top and bottom.

— **Pan&scan**: The player stretches the movie to its original format. It then cuts off a significant amount from the sides, but displays the picture in full height and sharpness. As you may miss important bits of the movie, it's only worth choosing this option if you have a very small TV and don't want to sacrifice any display area to black bars.

A jog dial on the remote is convenient for searching and playing a scene in slow motion.

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3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Built-in AC-3 / MPEG-2 decoder	Karaoke	Picture quality score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Error correction score (%)	Versatility score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Environment score (%)	Overall score (%)	Brand / model (in rank order)
		91	88	71	85	77	84	84	DENON DVD-2500 (A)
		84	87	75	86	75	85	82	SONY DVP-S725
		90	86	64	65	77	85	81	PANASONIC DVD-A160A
		85	84	70	86	76	86	81	SONY DVP-S525
		81	91	75	85	73	81	81	SONY DVP-S7700
✓		91	87	71	86	64	86	81	TOSHIBA SD-K320
		86	78	79	58	64	80	77	TOSHIBA SD 2109
		85	74	73	80	61	86	75	AKAI DV-P2000 (A)
✓		87	78	62	91	60	77	75	JVC XV-D705GD
		78	91	68	80	48	84	74	PIONEER DV-717
✓		80	73	78	75	51	85	72	PHILIPS DVD725

equal

equal

1 Can play recordable CD / rewritable CD

All the tested models have a laser beam that can read DVDs (depending on the regional code; see page 30), prerecorded audio CDs and videodiscs. The ticks in this column indicate whether they can also play other CD formats: recordable CDs (CD-R) can only be recorded on once, while rewritable CDs (CD-RW) can be recorded on again and again like an audio or video tape. Note that you can't record to a CD with the tested players — you need a CD burner to do that.

None of the tested models can play laser discs (which are much bigger) or photo CDs (which require a different laser technology).

2 Jog dial on player / remote

A jog dial (see the photo, left) is more convenient than using buttons if you want to search for a particular scene or play a scene in slow motion (even frame by frame). And it's more convenient when located on the remote than on the player.

3 Built-in AC-3 / MPEG-2 decoder

A tick in this column means the player has an internal decoder for the digital AC-3 and MPEG-2

surround-sound formats and six audio output connections for the up to six speakers that form part of a home-theatre system.

Models without a built-in decoder have to be connected to a surround-sound amplifier or receiver if you want to take advantage of home-theatre sound (see *How to connect the player*, page 33, for details).

4 Karaoke

Models with a tick in this column allow you to connect one or two microphones for karaoke.

5 Picture quality score

A user panel assessed the picture quality in normal play mode, as well as in the special modes 'still picture', 'search' and 'slow motion'. In addition, we carried out technical video measurements.

6 Sound quality score

A user panel assessed the sound quality in DVD AC-3 surround mode. Models without a built-in decoder were connected to a high-quality external AC-3 receiver.

In addition, we carried out technical sound measurements in CD mode, and measured the operational noise of the players.

7 Error correction score

We used test DVDs and audio CDs with defined faults (such as scratches) to determine the maximum error size the players can handle without causing visible or audible effects.

In addition, we tested how sensitive the players are to mechanical impacts by placing them on a vibrating table (to simulate vibrations from speakers sitting on the same shelf, or a knock against the shelf) and hitting them with a pendulum (simulating a direct knock).

8 Versatility score

We assessed the CD and DVD features against a list of what we think a good player should have.

9 Ease of use score

A user panel assessed how easy it is to set up the players, carry out basic tasks in DVD and CD modes and use the remote control and user manual.

In addition, we measured various access times, such as the time the players took to read a DVD (time from closing the drawer until the DVD information is displayed), and the time they took to fast forward to a certain movie scene.

10 Environment score

We measured the power consumption in DVD play mode and standby mode. In addition, we assessed how easy they are to disassemble for repair or recycling.

11 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of picture quality, sound quality, convenience/ease of use, versatility, error correction and environment, weighted as follows:

- Picture quality: 30%.
- Sound quality: 25%.
- Convenience/ease of use: 20%.
- Error correction: 15%.
- Versatility: 5%.
- Environment: 5%.

Genuinely sophisticated mobiles

Most of the phones are fine, so the crucial factor is choosing the right call plan.

IN BRIEF

- Although some assessments were more severe in this than in previous tests, only very few of the 28 tested phones showed major weaknesses (see the table, page 41).
- Lost your phone or had it stolen? If phone insurance isn't for you, there'll soon be another service that may increase your chances of getting it back. See *Missing your phone?*, right.
- There's a nationwide recycling scheme for old batteries and phones — see page 38 for details.
- With the analogue network being discontinued, a new network called CDMA is being established. See *Life after analogue*, page 39.

NEW-GENERATION GSM (GLOBAL System Mobile) phone are pretty impressive. Although our tests are now more severe, we had to look hard to find major weaknesses.

- Most models provide very good to excellent sound quality, even when there's background noise. The PHILIPS Savvy scored a bit lower than the others, but it's still good enough.
- Batteries are getting smaller and lighter, yet many of them lasted more than 30 hours in our time-in-use test, and more than five days on standby.

■ Most of the tested phones are sensitive enough to pick up even a fairly **weak network signal**. Only the PANASONIC EB-G520 struggled in this test, getting the lowest score by a long chalk for sensitivity. So if you're likely to need your mobile in areas with poor coverage, this model isn't for you.

■ The phones are getting smaller and have more features, but most of them are still relatively **easy to use**. While all of them could be improved in some way, we didn't find any model that's likely to drive you crazy.

■ Despite their size, most of the tested phones are **tough** little critters. We tossed them around a fair bit, but only the ERICSSON T28s suffered severe damage and became unusable. It shouldn't be your first choice if you're a bit on the clumsy side.

How to find the right call plan

If you want to join the growing number of mobile phone users, you need:

- A handset.
- A subscriber identity module (SIM) card — a computer chip with your phone number, a personal identification number (PIN) and features such as memory for phone numbers.

You can use the SIM card in any GSM phone. The network identifies the information on the card and charges calls to your account.

- A call plan or pre-paid SIM card.

Most people sign up for a call plan, which commits them for anything from 12 to 24 months. While you can usually upgrade to a more expensive plan at any time with no problem, cancelling or downgrading to a cheaper plan probably means you have to pay out the old plan, and in some cases even a penalty. So make sure you choose the plan that suits you best:

- Establish your usage pattern by estimating how many calls you're likely to make each day, what times you're most likely to make them, whether the majority will be local or long-distance, and how long the average call would be. Then you'll be able to compare the monthly cost to you of different call plans.
- Make sure you know the minimum cost of the



PRODUCTBANK

plan over its period — including the handset, connection fee, monthly access fee, call charges and fees for using services such as call diversion or voicemail.

If you don't want to commit yourself to a call plan for a year or more, or if you want to have more control over how much you spend on mobile calls, you can get a prepaid SIM card. With this, you pay a one-off fee, consisting of a connection fee and an amount for prepaid calls at fixed rates. The card is usually only valid for a limited time (say, two or three months). If you don't use up your prepaid calls within that time, you lose them.

Missing your phone?

Surely it's not because of our convict past — but Australia has a theft problem. Not only do we have one of the highest car theft rates in the world, up to 8000 mobile phones go missing each week — although not all of them are stolen.

There are two problems when your phone gets lost or stolen:

- **You don't want another person to make calls on your account.** You can avoid this by immediately calling your network provider and asking them to block your SIM card. So make sure you keep your SIM card number in a safe place.

- **You have to buy a new phone.** If you have phone insurance, this probably won't bother you too much — but insurance isn't cheap. A service called Findaphone, to be introduced in April this year, may be an alternative. Every mobile phone has a unique International Mobile Equipment Identification (IMEI) number. You can find your phone's IMEI number on a plate that's usually hidden behind the battery (in some cases you also need to detach the SIM card). It's a fairly long number with the pattern xxxxxx/xx/xxxxxx/x. Alternatively, you can get it by calling *#06# with your mobile.

Findaphone will have a database with all the IMEI numbers released in Australia. For a fee, you'll be able to register your phone and details with the service. If your phone gets lost or stolen, you inform Findaphone. They'll get in contact with mobile phone retailers, police, taxi companies, bus and train services, etc. If your phone shows up at any of these (for example, you lost or forgot the phone and somebody found it and handed it in, or it was stolen and somebody tried to get a new SIM card for it), Findaphone will be informed and arrange for the phone to be returned to you.

Hopefully, this service will make it much more difficult and therefore less profitable for thieves to sell stolen phones.

WHAT TO BUY

Apart from a few minor problems noted on page 36, there's not a great deal to choose between the tested models. Mobiles are generally more expensive if you don't buy them as part of a call plan. If you do buy one outright, choose the one with the features, size and price tag you want. We've profiled the top 12 models in the test (overleaf) to give you details of a good selection.

If you buy a phone as part of a plan it'll be discounted, but you may have a fairly limited choice of models. Even so, don't commit yourself to a plan that doesn't fit your needs just to get a particular model.

How safe are they?

The effects of electromagnetic radiation (EMR) emitted by mobile phones have been hotly debated for years.

The radiation can interfere with other electronic equipment, so switch your phone off when you're in an aircraft, hospital or petrol station. And if you have a heart pacemaker, ask your doctor whether you can use a mobile.

There's still no conclusive evidence on whether the radiation has any negative health effects (for example, some studies have suggested a link with brain cancer). While manufacturers have to measure the radiation levels of their phones for the Australian market, these figures aren't published. As long as there isn't conclusive evidence that mobile phones are safe, you ought to have the opportunity to pick the model that emits the lowest amount of radiation. So CHOICE would like to see the voluntary or regulated publication of radiation levels.

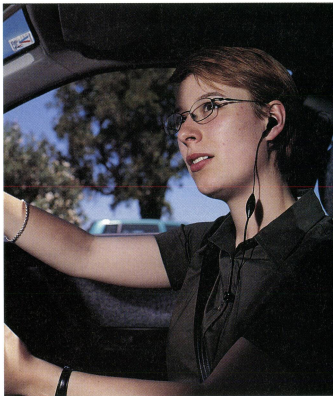
In the meantime, and to be on the safe side:

- Try to use your mobile phone as little as possible. If you have to use it a lot, invest in a hands-free kit. Children should be particularly careful, as their growing bodies may be more vulnerable to any potential radiation health effects.

- Digital mobiles vary their power output (and therefore the amount of radiation emitted) depending on the network signal strength. So try to minimise using your phone in weak network conditions (such as indoors, or on a bus or train).

- Don't carry your mobile close to your body when it's on standby.

Remember that it's illegal to drive a car and use a handheld mobile at the same time — use a hands-free kit.



Apart from a few problems (see page 36), there's not a great deal to choose between the tested models. All the top 12 phones are strong performers — we've listed some minor shortcomings and special features where appropriate.

The prices shown are the full price you have to pay if you don't buy the phone as part of a call plan, based on nationwide checks in November 1999. If you buy a phone as part of a call plan, it'll be discounted.



MOTOROLA V3688

Price: \$1295

Very good all-round performer. Incredibly tiny and light, making it the easiest of the tested models to transport. Yet it's packed with features, is very robust, and its battery is one of the most powerful in the test. Basic daily functions are particularly easy to use.



SIEMENS S25

Price: \$580

The only model in the test with a colour display. Very long standby time.



ERICSSON T18s

Price: \$799

Excellent sensitivity, but comparatively short standby time. Has a voice-dial function that allows you to dial a number by saying the name of the person you want to call.



MOTOROLA L7089

Price: \$799

Has a voice-dial function. Very long standby time, but a relatively poor instruction manual.



SAGEM MC850X

Price: \$500

Excellent sensitivity and the longest time in use of all the tested models.



ALCATEL One Touch Easy db

Price: \$299 (so if you're buying an undiscarded phone it's our Best Buy) Excellent sound quality and sensitivity. Can use AAA batteries, which is helpful if you can't recharge the regular battery.

Features they all have

- Plug-in charger (except **ALCATEL One Touch Easy db** and **HF**, which have a charging station).
- Small (stamp-size) SIM card.
- At least eight redial memories.
- At least nine fast-dial memories (one- or two-touch), except the **SONY CMD-C1** (only one).
- Several ring melodies and volumes.
- Illuminated display.
- Can send and receive short messages (SMS).
- Several phone speaker volumes.
- Keypad locking.
- Menu in several languages.
- Display shows signal strength, network ID and current battery capacity.

Phone recycling

If you have a worn-out mobile phone battery or a mobile phone you want to get rid of, don't throw it in the bin. Older-style NiCad batteries in particular shouldn't end up in landfill, as toxic cadmium can potentially leak from them and contaminate waterways. But all battery types, as well as the phone's circuit boards and plastic housing, contain valuable resources that can be recovered and reused.

So what should you do?

Use the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association's (AMTA) free nationwide recycling scheme. You can return batteries and phones made by participating manufacturers (see below) to retail outlets that belong to the scheme (such as Telstra, Optus, Orange, Strathfield Car Radios and Vodafone shops), and they're shipped to a Victorian facility for recycling.

The scheme was trialled for about a year in Sydney, Wollongong and Newcastle, and collected more than 100,000 batteries.

With more than six million mobile phones in Australia and the analogue network being discontinued, there'll be a constant stream of worn-out batteries and phones. So CHOICE welcomes this national recycling scheme. We encourage all mobile phone manufacturers who haven't yet joined the scheme to do so.

Manufacturers of other appliances using rechargeable batteries (such as cordless phones, cordless power tools and notebook computers) should also join the AMTA scheme or offer similar facilities for their products.

The following manufacturers had joined the AMTA scheme at the time we went to print: Alcatel, Brightpoint, Ericsson, Mitsubishi, Motorola, NEC, Nokia, Panasonic, Philips, RF Industries and Samsung.



AN AMTA INITIATIVE



PHILIPS Genie Sport

Price: \$459
Has a voice-dial function and is very light.



BOSCH GSM 509

Price: \$385
Excellent sound quality.



ERICSSON T28s

Price: \$1300
Has a voice-dial function and is very light. Not as robust as the other tested models — was unusable after our tumble test. Its battery was one of the weakest in the test for both standby time and in use.



MOTOROLA StarTac X

Price: \$779
Very light, but relatively short standby time.



PHILIPS Genie Dual Band

Price: \$599
Has a voice-dial function. Very light and has the best instruction manual in the test.



SAMSUNG SGH-600

Price: \$759
Has a voice-dial function. Its daily functions are very easy to use. Relatively short standby time.

Where are they made?

Some of the tested models are assembled in different countries, using components sourced from various other countries. That's why we haven't included origin information in the table overleaf.

Life after analogue

On December 31, 1999, the analogue mobile phone network was closed in all metropolitan and some regional areas. The remaining areas will be closed this year.

For analogue phone users this means buying a new phone and subscribing to a different network. In many areas you'll have the choice between the familiar GSM digital network (the phones in this test are GSM models) or a new digital network called CDMA that's replacing the analogue system. In regional areas without GSM coverage, CDMA is your only option.

CDMA and GSM are not compatible. However, CDMA phones are dual-mode, which means they can also operate in the analogue network while it's still available. (Don't confuse dual-mode and dual-band — see note 2, page 40.) They switch automatically when you move between networks. However, if you happen to be on a call while crossing the network border, you'll be disconnected and have to dial again.

CDMA phones are similar in size and weight to GSM models, and offer similar security and features.

Don't just throw your old analogue phone in the bin, but use the phone recycling scheme where it's available (see *Phone recycling*, left, for details). Also make sure you cancel your analogue service with your provider. Otherwise you'll continue to be charged access fees, and somebody who finds your phone will be able to make calls charged to your account if you live in an area where the analogue system is still operating.



More than just a phone: the Nokia 9110 Communicator has a large display and keyboard, organiser functions (such as a time manager, calendar and to-do list) and a built-in modem (so you can send and receive email and faxes). But compared to the other models tested it's quite heavy and bulky.

MOBILE PHONES

[illegible]

* Prices are based on nationwide checks in November 1999. You'll probably pay much less if you buy the phone as part of a call plan.

** The dimensions and weight may be different when a different battery is used.

(A) This model was also in last year's test. Because some of our assessments have changed it's been retested, so this year's scores aren't comparable with last year's.

(C) According to the manufacturer, this model is being

(D) Model name depends on network provider.

(G) Six months on the battery.

(H) When folded; larger for making a call — for example, you may have to open a cover.

(J) This feature isn't available with the tested standard battery, but with an optional special battery.

(K) Via special infrared connection.

(L) Built-in modem.

(M) Now available with rapid charger (90 minutes).

(N) May be longer when power-saving mode is used.

1 Antenna type

E = Extendable; F = Fixed length;

I = Internal.

 Dual-band

2 Models with a tick in this column can work on both the 900 MHz and 1800 MHz GSM network frequency bands. Australia currently uses the 900 MHz band, but the second band is ready for use if required in the future. Dual-band models allow you to use your phone ('roam') in more overseas countries than 900 MHz models.

Interval beep timer

3 Models with a tick beep at certain intervals (either preset or selected by you) during a call, so you can keep track of the time you spend on the phone.

Vibration feature

One tick indicates you can set the phone to vibrate instead of ring, which can be useful — for example, when you're in a meeting or restaurant.

1 2 3 4 5

Antenna type	Dual-band	Interval beep timer	Vibration feature	PC connection
F	✓	✓	✓✓	✓
F	✓	✓	✓	(K)
F	✓	✓	✓	(K)
F	✓	✓	✓✓	✓
F	✓		✓✓	✓ (L)
F	✓	✓	(J)	
E			(J)	✓
F			(J)	
F	✓	✓	✓✓	(K)
E		✓	✓✓	✓
E	✓		(J)	✓
E		✓	✓✓	ns
F	✓		(J)	✓
I	✓		✓	
F	✓		(J)	✓
E		✓	(J)	✓
F				
F			(J)	✓
F	✓		✓✓	✓
F	✓	✓		✓
F	✓	✓		✓
F	✓		✓✓	✓
F	✓	✓		
F			✓✓	✓
I		✓		
E				(L)
F				
F			✓✓	✓

F PC connection

A tick in this column means you can connect the phone to a PC card and use it to send and receive email and faxes.

Charging time

6 The results may be different if you buy a different battery for your phone.

Standby time / time in use

If you choose a different battery, these times are likely to be different. Network conditions can also affect the results.

■ **Standby time:** How long the supplied battery lasted when we had the phone switched on (ready to receive calls), but didn't use it. Some models last for more than 200 hours, which is impressive.

■ **Time in use:** How long the supplied battery lasted in our simulated usage cycle: for 10 hours a

6	7	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Battery charging time (min)	Standby time (hours)	Time in use (hours)	Battery score (%)	Intelligibility / sound quality score (%)	Sensitivity score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Tumble test score (%)	Overall score (%)	Brand / model (in rank order)
	130	39	90	96	85	83	100	89	MOTOROLA V3688
	150	29	75	96	95	80	100	87	SIEMENS S25
	78	31	77	92	100	78	80	86	ERICSSON T18s
	175	40	88	92	90	75	100	86	MOTOROLA L7089
	115	48	90	86	100	70	100	86	SAGEM MC850X
	145	25	73	100	100	68	100	85	ALCATEL One Touch Easy db
	100	35	86	90	90	73	100	85	PHILIPS Genie Sport
	83 (N)	27	75	100	90	71	100	84	BOSCH GSM 509
	56	20	77	96	90	81	40	84	ERICSSON T28s
	64	30	80	82	95	78	100	84	MOTOROLA StarTac X (A)
	125	27	80	96	85	74	100	84	PHILIPS Genie Dual Band
	62	35	77	92	90	80	80	84	SAMSUNG SGH-600
	95 (N)	28	81	86	90	78	80	83	BOSCH GSM 909 Dual (B)
	170	35	77	92	90	69	100	82	NOKIA 3210
	150	40	81	86	95	72	80	82	NOKIA 6150
	135	23	70	92	95	68	100	81	ALCATEL One Touch Easy HF (C)
	105	25	81	86	85	73	80	81	MITSUBISHI MT-18
	229	45	80	100	70	65	100	80	NOKIA 5110 (A)
	80	30	69	96	70	78	100	80	PANASONIC EB-GD90
	82	31	69	92	85	69	80	79	ERICSSON A1018s
	95	44	81	92	80	63	100	79	MOTOROLA Jazz DB / M30 (D)
(M)	74	26	70	86	90	66	100	78	SAGEM MC820
	110	23	69	86	100	67	60	78	SIEMENS C25
(M)	78	29	73	80	95	64	80	77	SAGEM RC820
	90	20	74	90	75	68	80	77	SONY CMD-C1 (C)
	175	42	71	92	70	65	100	76	NOKIA 9110 Communicator
	215	36	84	70	95	60	100	76	PHILIPS Savvy
	78	30	63	86	55	70	100	71	PANASONIC EB-G520 (C)

day we made one three-minute call per hour, and left the phone on standby between calls. We switched the phone off for the remaining 14 hours. This test gives a more meaningful and realistic comparison than the 'maximum talk time' that's often quoted.

8 Battery score

This score is mainly based on the 'time in use' result. But we also considered the standby and charging times, the weight the battery adds to the phone and the usefulness of the battery status warning (how much talk time it leaves you between the warning and the battery going flat).

9 Intelligibility and sound quality score

For both incoming and outgoing calls, a user panel assessed the following:

- Intelligibility of words under quiet conditions.
- Intelligibility of words with surrounding noise.
- Sound quality (for example, how easy it was to recognise somebody's voice, or any echo).

10 Sensitivity score

A mining tunnel simulated performance in an area with poor coverage. Outside the tunnel there's good reception but it gets worse the further you walk in. We assessed the maximum distance from the entrance at which the phone was still able to make a connection, and the maximum distance at which it could still maintain one.

11 Ease of use score

A user panel assessed the following:

- Instruction manual (for completeness and clarity).
- Daily use (for example, ease of answering an incoming call, redialling, storing a number into memory, receiving a short message).
- Ergonomics (for example, handling during a call, use of the keypad and reading the display).

12 Tumble test score

We put the phones in an 80 cm diameter barrel that was then turned, simulating falls, say,

from a table or out of a shirt pocket. After every five turns the phones were checked for damage, and there was a maximum of 50 falls. This is a fairly severe test.

Some models were slightly damaged but still usable. However, the **ERICSSON T28s** suffered a broken cover, which includes the microphone and therefore left the phone unusable.

13 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of the following:

- Battery: 20%.
- Intelligibility/sound quality: 25%.
- Sensitivity: 20%.
- Ease of use: 30%.
- Tumble test: 5%.



WASHING machines

Fifteen front loaders, 33 top loaders and one hybrid. We've tested them all to help you find the washing machine that best meets your needs.

IN BRIEF

- Front-loading machines generally use less water and energy than top loaders, and aren't as tough on clothes.
- One of the machines on test has combined the advantages of both front and top loaders — it's a top-loading drum machine.
- The top loaders with 'air bubble generators' (see *Impellers and air bubbles*, right, for details) got the washing quite clean, but used a lot more water.

THE STORY'S STILL THE SAME: FRONT loaders have the edge over top loaders for energy and water efficiency (and therefore running costs) as well as gentleness to fabrics.

On the other hand, top loaders tend to be cheaper to buy. They're also easier to load and unload, and can take larger loads, although the capacity is often overstated. And you can stop them partway through the wash to add forgotten clothes, which is more awkward to do with most front loaders.

What's new? We found a well-performing 'hybrid' and a few water guzzlers.

The hybrid

In one of the tested machines (we'll test more of this type later this year), the advantages of front

and top loader are combined. The BENDIX Bambina TL 843 X has a drum, like a front loader, but you load and unload it from the top, so you don't have to squat or bend down.

If you have limited space for a washing machine (in the bathroom, say), this BENDIX may be a good choice. It's about 20 cm narrower than other machines of similar capacity.

Its energy and water efficiency are comparable to the front loaders in the test, all of which ranked higher than the top loaders. While it's not as gentle on clothes as the front loaders, it still beats most top loaders in this respect.

Impellers and air bubbles

The tests confirmed that front loaders are generally a lot gentler on clothes than top loaders *with an agitator*. In this test there were five top loaders (the two HITACHI and three LG models) with an impeller — a pulsator on the tub base that generates water currents, or turbulence, to move the items around in the water. So does this type treat fabrics more gently? Well, one did — the LG Fuzzy Logic WF-801 was exceptionally gentle on clothes; the performance of the others, however, was comparable to that of agitator-type models.

The three DAEWOO models claim to incorporate the latest technology in washing: air bubbles. They're supposed to improve washing performance. It seemed to work — the dirt removal scores were among the best. Overall, however, these machines scored among the lowest, mainly due to their poor water efficiency. All three used more than 200 L of water for a normal wash (the other models used between 53 and 189 L, except for the LG Fuzzy Logic WF-801 mentioned above, which used 206 L).

BEST BUYS

The front loaders in the test all performed very similarly, so we based the **Best Buys** on purchase price and running costs.

For the top loaders (small, medium and large machines) we did the same, and also excluded those that scored less than 40% in any score category.

Front loaders (claimed capacity: 5 kg)

WHIRLPOOL AWM 285	\$999
GE WWH6104	\$995
WHIRLPOOL AWM 293	\$799

Small top loaders (claimed capacity: 4.5–5.5 kg)

HOOVER 550EM	\$765
HOOVER 550M	\$655
HOOVER 500M	\$585
SIMPSON Esprit 365550J	\$599

Medium top loaders (claimed capacity: 6–7 kg)

HOOVER Boss 650L	\$799
WHIRLPOOL 6LBR6245EQ	\$849

Large top loaders (claimed capacity: 7.5 kg +)

HOOVER Boss 750L	\$849
HOOVER Boss 800EL	\$995
HOOVER Boss 800RL	\$899

BEST BUYS

For people with a disability

We assessed the washing machines for ease of use by people with a disability.

■ If you use a **wheelchair** or have **back problems**, a front loader is generally more convenient. You can mount it on a raised surface to avoid bending, or load and unload it while sitting down. If you prefer a top loader, you might have to use a stick to help you unload it. Access to the drum of a front loader is easier when the door opening is large and/or the door opens wide. The **WHIRLPOOL** front loaders in this test have very wide mouths that open to 180°.

■ If you have **problems with vision**, make sure the controls are easy to read. Positive feedback such as lights and beeps when you press buttons is helpful (as on the **DAEWOO**, **FISHER & PAYKEL**, **HITACHI** and **LG** machines, the **HOOVER** models **550EM** and **Boss 800EL** and **SIMPSON Encore 225756**); other tactile, audio and visual feedback can help too. Best from this test for those with visual problems are: the **HOOVER Boss 750L** and **650L**, the **WHIRLPOOL** front loaders and the **WHIRLPOOL** top loaders **6LBR5132EQ**, **6LSR7244EQ** and **6LS55232DQ**.

■ If you have **problems using your hands**, look for raised dials with a crossbar, or buttons that only require a soft touch to activate. Keypad controls should be easy to press (as on the **HOOVER Boss 800 EL** and the **LG Fuzzy Logic**, **DAEWOO Air Power** and **HITACHI** machines tested). Rotary controls can be more difficult to turn if you lack hand strength. On the **WHIRLPOOL** models **6LS55232DQ** and **6LSR7244EQ** they're easier to rotate than on some others.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Before you hit the shops to buy a new washing machine, make a list of what you need. The tips below should help you make the right choice.

Capacity

■ When deciding on capacity, think about how you use your current machine. Look inside the machines you're interested in and compare drum sizes. As we've found in many tests, the manufacturer's claimed capacity is often unrealistic.

Convenience

■ If you have limited space, consider a front loader, or a top loader with a lid that folds back, which leaves enough space to put a dryer above it.

■ If it's important to get your washing done quickly, a top loader may be a better choice because their wash cycles are shorter than those of front loaders (the **DAEWOO Air Power** machines are an exception in this test).

■ If you're concerned about your clothes creasing in the washing machine, a spin-speed reduction option can help, but your clothes will come out wetter.

■ Check the labelling — is it clear and the program selection straightforward? You won't want to consult the manual every time you use a different program.

■ Are the controls easy to use; is the lint filter easy to clean and the detergent drawer easy to use?

Water matters

■ If you have a limited water supply, consider buying a front loader, which is more water-



The **Bendix Bambina TL 843X** has a drum action like a front loader but opens at the top. Narrower than most machines, it could be a good choice if you have limited space.

efficient than a top loader.

■ Look for automatic load-sensing or reduced-load functions, which can help save water when you wash smaller loads.

■ With a suds or water-save feature you can reuse your sudsy and/or rinse water.

■ Do you have hot and cold water connections or cold only in your laundry? Some machines need both to operate correctly, or a special connector or a sealing cap for the hot-water inlet, if you want to connect it to cold water only. (The table on page 46 indicates the necessary connectors for the machines tested.)

■ If you have a limited supply of hot water, or live in an area where the cold-water temperature can drop very low and you only have a cold-water tap, you might want to buy a washing machine with a heater. None of the top loaders in this test has one.

How reliable have subscribers found them?

We asked a group of subscribers whether they'd had problems with their washing machine over the previous 12 months and whether they would buy the same brand again.

The majority of them owned a top loader (86%). Nearly half had a machine with 5–7 kg claimed capacity and about a third a larger model (more than 7 kg).

A fairly large number of our survey respondents — more than 20% — reported their machine had needed repair. This is quite high compared with most other appliances. The most frequently experienced problem was the machine being out of balance, followed by burst or leaking hoses. The average cost of repair was around \$120.

The graphs, right, show the results for the brands for which we received sufficient answers (the number in brackets tells you how many readers reported on the brand). Note that the results of the survey also cover brands not included in this test, and that we don't have reliability data for all brands on the market.

Percentage not needing repair

Kleenmaid (214)	88
Fisher & Paykel (595)	85
Miele (59)	85
Asko-Asea (70)	83
Hitachi (288)	83
Westinghouse (71)	83
General Electric (137)	80
Whirlpool (237)	77
Simpson (1150)	76
Hoover (1225)	73
Gorenje Pacific/ Gorenje (62)	69

Percentage who would buy the same brand again

Fisher & Paykel (593)	95
Hitachi (285)	94
Miele (60)	93
Whirlpool (236)	92
Kleenmaid (210)	90
Westinghouse (73)	90
Asko-Asea (72)	89
Hoover (1222)	85
Simpson (1137)	85
General Electric (133)	80
Gorenje Pacific/ Gorenje (62)	66

Front loaders (claimed capacity: 5 kg)



WHIRLPOOL AWM 285

Target price: \$999

This machine performed well in all aspects. It rates equal best overall, is one of the cheaper front loaders to buy and to run, and is particularly water-efficient.



GE WWH6104

Target price: \$995

This front loader scored equal second-best overall, is good for dirt removal and is particularly energy and water-efficient. It has a relatively low score for spin efficiency, and it has a spin-speed reduction option.



WHIRLPOOL AWM 293

Target price: \$799

This is the cheapest to buy of the front loaders. It scored very well for dirt removal, but in a hot 60°C wash (there's no "normal" wash program at 40°C, the "warm" wash we'd usually test at — only for lightly soiled or delicate clothing, for which the manufacturer recommends a half load). It heats its own water, and the running costs are still reasonable. It has a relatively low score for spin efficiency, which may not be a problem if you don't have to use a clothes dryer.

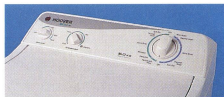
Small top loaders (claimed capacity: 4.5–5.5 kg)



HOOVER 550M (550EM)

Target price: \$50M: \$655, 550EM: \$765

Of the smaller top loaders in the test, these two machines performed relatively well overall, and are much cheaper to run than the other top loaders of this size.



HOOVER 500M

Target price: \$585

This is one of the cheapest to buy of the smaller top loaders, and performed relatively well overall.



SIMPSON Esprit 36S550J

Target price: \$599

This top loader has good dirt removal and spin efficiency scores, but lower scores for water efficiency and gentleness, though all above our cut-off of 40%.

Medium top loaders (claimed capacity: 6–7 kg)



HOOVER Boss 650L

Target price: \$799

This medium-sized top loader scored very well for dirt removal, but not as well for gentleness and water efficiency.



WHIRLPOOL 6LBR6245EQ

Target price: \$849

Of the medium-sized top loaders, this is one of the cheapest to run — and one of only two in this group that wasn't let down by a score lower than 40% in any category.



Large top loaders (claimed capacity: 7.5 kg +)



HOOVER Boss 750L

Target price: \$849

This is the cheapest to buy of the large top loaders. In this group it scored very well for dirt removal and energy efficiency, but not as well for gentleness. It's one of the most water-efficient of all the top loaders in the test.



HOOVER Boss 800EL (800RL)

Target price: 800EL: \$995; 800RL: \$899.

A good, all-round performer. The cheapest to run of this size, and one of the most water-efficient of all the top loaders in the test.

Notes to the table, overleaf

Some of the machines in this test have slightly different scores from those previously reported in CHOICE because we've revised our test methods to reflect changing household usage.

Clones

The machines joined by a square bracket in the table are 'clones': they're technically the same, so have the same performance scores and claimed capacities, but different features, extra wash programs, etc.

1 Wash capacity (kg, claimed / tested / measured)

'Claimed' is what's on the energy label, 'tested' is the weight of clothes we washed (80% of claimed, which is generally a more realistic load) and 'measured' relates to a standard way of calculating capacity — it provides an accurate indication of the *real* relative differences in drum sizes, since it's independent of any claims.

2 Cold-only tap connection required

If you want to use just cold water, you may need a special 'Y' connector or a sealing cap for the hot water inlet (noted in the table with Y or Cap). Unless stated otherwise, these aren't supplied.

3 Noise

These are the maximum noise levels recorded during the spin cycle, measured 1 m away from the machine and 1 m above the ground. The noise level of these machines is similar to that of a normal conversation (around 65 dB).

4 Running costs

This is an estimate of how much it'll cost you over 10 years (the average life of a washing machine) for water and electricity if you wash the equivalent of one load every day using a 'normal' cycle. The calculations are based on 12 cents per kWh for electricity and \$1 per 1000 L for water.

Machines with electronic program selection consume some energy on standby. Where applicable (marked with # in the table), we've included the standby energy costs for 10 years in the total costs for energy.

For simplicity, we've excluded depreciation and any interest costs, as well as the cost of detergent — people use different amounts and the price varies considerably between brands.

5 Water used / water efficiency score

The first column gives the total amount of water used (rounded to the nearest litre) for a normal warm-water wash. To compare water efficiency between machines, we calculated the amount of water used per kilogram of the test load of washing. The lower the water consumption per kilogram, the higher the water efficiency score.

6 Energy efficiency score

The machine's energy efficiency is measured on the basis of kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity used for each kilogram of the test load of washing. A higher energy efficiency score means less energy is used.

7 Spin efficiency score

To measure how well a machine extracts the water from clothes, we weighed them before and after the wash. The higher the score, the more water is removed, which means the washing takes less time (and energy, if you use a dryer) to dry. We used the spin speed for a normal cycle — on some machines you can reduce it for garments that crease easily.

8 Gentleness score

To measure the wear and tear on clothes, we attached swatches of easily frayed fabric to the garments in each load. The area of the swatch was measured before and after the wash. The less fraying, the more gentle the machine was on its normal cycle and the higher the score.

9 Dirt removal score

To assess dirt removal, we measured how much light specially soiled swatches reflected before and after washing. We've only reported on dirt removal using a warm-water wash. Depending on the detergent used, a cold wash might remove slightly less dirt than a warm wash (poor detergents tend to improve in warm water).

10 Overall score

Dirt removal contributes 40% to the overall score, with gentleness, and water, energy and spin efficiency each weighted equally at 15%.

Footnotes to the table, overleaf

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in August/September 1999.

** Dimensions (rounded up to the next 5 mm) are measured for the smallest 'box' that could be placed around the machine, allowing space for the inlet and drain hoses. It's best to leave extra space around the machine for easy installation and air circulation.

Includes standby costs — see note 4, left.

(fr) Front loader.

(tp) Top loader.

(t/dr) Top-loading drum type.

(A) The manufacturer told us this model has been discontinued, but we still found it in the shops.

(B) Omega says this model will be replaced by the CW 675A and will look like the CW 852. Technically, it'll stay the same as the CW 675.

(C) LG says some of these models tested may still be available, but all its newer models now have a 'T' preceding the model number (eg WF-T451). LG says these models have almost identical energy and water consumption to those tested, but have drums that rotate during the wash cycle with the aim of improving washing performance and reducing tangling.

(D) Additional eight years, parts only, for stainless steel bowl and water tub.

(E) Additional three years on the motor (replacement parts only), and eight years on the stainless steel cylinder.

(F) Additional three years for parts on motor, eight years for parts on stainless steel inner or outer cylinder.

(G) Limited 10-year warranty on the inner stainless steel bowl.

(H) Third to tenth year; parts only for replacement of stainless steel bowl and outer tub, should it crack or fail to hold water.

(I) Extra year of free service if 'SmartCare' warranty registration card is completed and returned.

(K) Additional three years for replacement parts of transmission assembly (gearbox, clutch, brake and motor).

(L) Additional three years parts for gear case assembly, top and lid rust; additional eight years parts for outer tub.

(M) Additional three years on the transmission.

(N) Third to fifth year; parts only for gear case assembly and lid rust; third to tenth year; parts only for outer tub.

(P) Five years parts for gear case assembly, top and lid rust, 10 years parts for outer tub.

(Q) You can also disconnect the hot-water hose.

(R) Y connector supplied on installation, if required.

(S) Don't connect the hot-water inlet hose.

(T) This machine performed erratically for water use and spin efficiency. In one of the test runs it used about 250 L more water in an attempt to redistribute the load; in another run it spun the clothes at much lower speed and left them much wetter.

(U) The models tested have a maximum spin speed of 800 rpm, but these 'clones' have a maximum of 1000 rpm, which should give better results.

(V) The result for a 60°C wash. There's no 40°C 'normal' wash program, only for lightly soiled or delicate clothing, and recommended for loads half the claimed capacity.

WASHING MACHINES

1

Wash capacity
(kg, claimed /
tested /
measured)

2

Cold-only
tap
connection
required

3

	Brand / model (in rank order)	Manufacturer / distributor	Origin	Target price (\$)*	Warranty (years)	Dimensions** (H x W x D, mm)	Wash capacity (kg, claimed / tested / measured)	Cold-only tap connection required	Heater	Nois
equal	HOVER New Wave 1200F (fr)	Email	Italy	1149	2	850 x 595 x 550	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.5	Cap	✓	67
	OMEGA CW 852 (fr)	Merloni / Omega	Italy	1299	2	845 x 595 x 540	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.5	Y	✓	59
	WHIRLPOOL AWM 285 (fr) ★	Whirlpool	Italy	999	2 (D)	845 x 595 x 570	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.5	Y	✓	63
equal	WHIRLPOOL AWM 295 (fr)	Whirlpool	Italy	1250	2 (D)	845 x 595 x 580	5.5 / 4.5 / 3.5	Y	✓	68
	BENDIX Bambina TL 843 X (tdr)	Bendix	Italy	1099	2 (E)	880 x 395 x 595	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.5		✓	59
	GE WWH6104 (fr) ★	Fagor / MEA	Spain	995	2	850 x 595 x 555	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.5		✓	66
equal	THOR Elite TWM 800 (fr)	Bendix	Italy	1049	2 (F)	855 x 595 x 575	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.5	Y	✓	62
	THOR TH 95 (fr) (A)	Bendix	Italy	995	2 (F)	850 x 595 x 520	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.0	Y	✓	60
	ARISTON AB 936 (fr)	Arist	Italy	999	5	855 x 595 x 555	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.5	Y (supplied)	✓	67
equal	BOSCH WFB1605 AU (fr)	Bosch	Spain	1099	2	850 x 595 x 560	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.0	Cap (Q)	✓	66
	BOSCH WFB2005 AU (fr)	Bosch	Spain	1180	2	850 x 595 x 560	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.0	Cap (Q)	✓	66
	GE WWH6604 (fr)	GE / MEA	UK	1195	2 (G)	850 x 595 x 575	5.0 / 4.0 / 4.0	Y (supplied)	✓	65
equal	GE WWH7604 (fr)	GE / MEA	UK	1395	2 (G)	850 x 595 x 575	5.0 / 4.0 / 4.0	Y (supplied)	✓	65
	KLEENMAID KFL800	Kleenmaid	Slovenia	1299	5	860 x 595 x 575	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.0	Y (R)	✓	65
	WHIRLPOOL AWM 293 (fr) ★	Whirlpool	Italy	799	2 (H)	845 x 595 x 560	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.5	Y	✓	65
equal	OMEGA CW 675 (fr) (B)	Merloni / Omega	Italy	1079	2	845 x 595 x 520	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.0		✓	58
	FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW509 (tp)	Fisher & Paykel	Australia or NZ	795	1 (J)	980 x 560 x 620	5.5 / 4.5 / 4.0	Cap (Q)	✓	63
	FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW609 (tp)	Fisher & Paykel	Australia or NZ	899	1 (J)	985 x 600 x 650	6.5 / 5.0 / 5.0	Cap (Q)	✓	69
equal	FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW709 (tp)	Fisher & Paykel	Australia or NZ	995	1 (J)	990 x 650 x 700	7.5 / 6.0 / 6.0	Cap (Q)	✓	66
	HOOPER Boss 750L (tp) ★	Email	Australia	849	2	1030 x 655 x 735	7.5 / 6.0 / 6.0	Cap	✓	59
	HOOPER Boss 800EL (tp) ★	Email	Australia	995	2	1040 x 655 x 735	8.0 / 6.5 / 5.5	Cap	✓	64
equal	HOOPER Boss 800RL (tp) ★	Email	Australia	899	2	1040 x 655 x 735	8.0 / 6.5 / 5.5	Cap	✓	64
	SIMPSON Encore 225756L (tp)	Email	Australia	995	2 (K)	1085 x 675 x 705	7.5 / 6.0 / 5.0	Cap	✓	60
	SIMPSON Encore 225757L (tp)	Email	Australia	1095	2 (K)	1085 x 675 x 705	7.5 / 6.0 / 5.0	Cap	✓	60
equal	WHIRLPOOL 6LSC8255EQ (tp)	Whirlpool	US	1099	2 (L)	1060 x 680 x 700	7.5 / 6.0 / 5.0	Y	✓	63
	WHIRLPOOL 6LSR7244EQ (tp)	Whirlpool	US	1049	2 (L)	1060 x 680 x 700	7.5 / 6.0 / 5.0	Y	✓	63
	HOOPER 550EM (tp) (A) ★	Email	Australia	765	2	980 x 590 x 640	5.5 / 4.5 / 4.5	Cap	✓	66
equal	HOOPER 550M (tp) ★	Email	Australia	655	2	980 x 590 x 640	5.5 / 4.5 / 4.5	Cap	✓	66
	HOOPER 500M (tp) ★	Email	Australia	585	2	965 x 590 x 630	5.0 / 4.0 / 3.0	Cap	✓	66
	HOOPER Boss 650L (tp) (A) ★	Email	Australia	799	2	1030 x 655 x 735	6.5 / 5.0 / 4.5	Cap	✓	67
equal	SIMPSON Enduro 225751J (tp) (A)	Email	Australia	899	2 (K)	1100 x 675 x 725	7.5 / 6.0 / 5.0	Cap	✓	64
	SIMPSON Enduro 225752J (tp) (A)	Email	Australia	999	2 (K)	1100 x 675 x 725	7.5 / 6.0 / 5.0	Cap	✓	64
	SIMPSON Esprit 225750J (tp)	Email	Australia	829	2 (K)	1100 x 675 x 725	7.5 / 6.0 / 5.0	Cap	✓	64
equal	HITACHI SF-6000PX (tp)	Hitachi	Japan	799	2	925 x 585 x 645	6.0 / 5.0 / 3.0	(S)	✓	60
	HITACHI SF-6500PX (tp)	Hitachi	Japan	799	2	925 x 585 x 645	6.5 / 5.0 / 3.0	(S)	✓	58
	FISHER & PAYKEL Fresh AW095 (tp)	Fisher & Paykel	Australia or NZ	599	1 (J)	1000 x 560 x 620	5.0 / 4.0 / 4.0	Cap (Q)	✓	71
equal	LG Fuzzy Logic WF-451 (tp) (C)	LG	Korea	549	2	850 x 535 x 575	4.5 / 3.5 / 2.5	(S)	✓	55
	LG Fuzzy Logic WF-801 (tp) (C)	LG	Korea	995	2	1025 x 625 x 685	8.0 / 6.5 / 3.5	(S)	✓	59
	SIMPSON Concorde 365541J (tp) (A)	Email	Australia	595	2 (M)	1015 x 580 x 625	5.0 / 4.0 / 4.0	Cap (Q)	✓	61
equal	SIMPSON Enduro 365551J (tp)	Email	Australia	760	2 (M)	1040 x 575 x 625	5.5 / 4.5 / 4.0	Cap (Q)	✓	63
	SIMPSON Enduro 365552J (tp)	Email	Australia	849	2 (M)	1040 x 575 x 625	5.5 / 4.5 / 4.0	Cap (Q)	✓	63
	SIMPSON Esprit 365550J (tp) (A) ★	Email	Australia	599	2 (M)	1040 x 575 x 625	5.5 / 4.5 / 4.0	Cap (Q)	✓	63
equal	WHIRLPOOL 6LBR6245EQ (tp) ★	Whirlpool	US	849	2 (N)	1060 x 610 x 710	6.0 / 5.0 / 5.0	Y	✓	60
	WHIRLPOOL 6LSS5232DQ (tp)	Whirlpool	US	949	2 (P)	1060 x 680 x 700	7.0 / 5.5 / 5.0	Y	✓	58
	DAEWOO Air Power DWF-6094R (tp)	Daewoo	Korea	699	3	1000 x 605 x 645	6.0 / 5.0 / 3.0	(S)	✓	63
equal	DAEWOO Air Power DWF-7094R (tp)	Daewoo	Korea	799	3	955 x 610 x 645	7.0 / 5.5 / 3.0	(S)	✓	63
	DAEWOO Air Power DWF-8094R (tp)	Daewoo	Korea	895	3	990 x 630 x 670	8.0 / 6.5 / 3.5	(S)	✓	67
	LG Fuzzy Logic WF-651 (tp) (C)	LG	Korea	799	2	910 x 585 x 650	6.5 / 5.0 / 3.0	(S)	✓	58
	WHIRLPOOL 6LBR5132EQ (tp)	Whirlpool	US	699	2 (N)	1060 x 610 x 710	5.5 / 4.5 / 5.0	Y	✓	62



	4	5	5	6	7	8	9	10	
cycle time minutes / normal wash	Running costs (\$ / 10 years)	Water used (L)	Water efficiency score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Spin efficiency score (%)	Gentleness score (%)	Dirt removal score (%)	Overall score (%)	Brand / model (in rank order)
5	562	76	62	80	75	76	82	77	HOOVER New Wave 1200F (fr)
8	445	53	73	82	68	74	80	77	OMEGA CW 852 (fr)
8	475	61	70	82	66	76	82	77	WHIRLPOOL AWM 285 (fr)
	552	73	67	82	73	76	81	77	WHIRLPOOL AWM 295 (fr)
	576	67	67	76	65	68	83	76	BENDIX Bambina TL 843 X (tdr)
	469	58	71	82	54	76	83	76	GE WWW6104 (fr)
	745	73	64	66	74	78	83	76	THOR Elite TW8 800 (fr)
	577	54	73	73	62	76	83	76	THOR TH 95 (fr) (A)
	521	79	60	83	64	76	79	74	ARISTON AB 936 (fr)
	537	77	62	82	60	76	80	74	BOSCH WFB 1605 AU (fr)]
	537	77	62	82	60 (U)	76	80	74	BOSCH WFB 2005 AU (fr)]
	765	68	66	63	61	76	84	74	GE WWW6604 (fr)]
	765	68	66	63	61 (U)	76	84	74	GE WWW7604 (fr)]
	521	78	61	83	68	74	77	74	KLEENMAID KFL800 (fr)
	642	73	64	72	57	76	85 (V)	74	WHIRLPOOL AWM 293 (fr)
	655	69	65	71	38	78	84	71	OMEGA CW 675 (fr) (B)
	954	134	41	71	75	58	82	70	FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW509 (tp)
	1110	159	36	70	79	58	81	69	FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW609 (tp)
	1309	189	37	71	76	50	84	69	FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW709 (tp)
	1229	135	55	65	71	44	83	69	HOOVER Boss 750L (tp)
	1224	147	55	70	72	54	80	69	HOOVER Boss 800EL (tp)]
	1224	147	55	70	72	54	80	69	HOOVER Boss 800RL (tp)]
	1451	174	42	61	74	58	84	69	SIMPSON Encore 225756J (tp)]
	1451	174	42	61	74	58	84	69	SIMPSON Encore 225757J (tp)]
	1536	159	47	55	67	64	82	68	WHIRLPOOL GLSC8255EQ (tp)
	1536	159	47	55	67	64	82	68	WHIRLPOOL GLSR7244EQ (tp)
	1112 #	122	46	59	64	60	82	67	HOOVER 550EM (tp)]
	1112 #	122	46	59	64	60	82	67	HOOVER 550M (tp)]
	837	90	55	64	55	56	80	66	HOOVER 500M (tp)
	1300	145	42	56	64	48	86	66	HOOVER Boss 650L (tp) (A)
	1584	187	38	57	65	54	85	66	SIMPSON Enduro 225751J (tp) (A)]
	1584	187	38	57	65	54	85	66	SIMPSON Enduro 225752J (tp) (A)]
	1584	187	38	57	65	54	85	66	SIMPSON Esprit 225750J (tp)]
	1365	156	38	55	57	60	84	65	HITACHI SF-6000PX (tp)
	1475 #	159	36	51	61	54	86	65	HITACHI SF-6500PX (tp)
	1223	135	33	48	78	56	80	64	FISHER & PAYKEL Fresh AW095 (tp)
	1087 #	117	33	47	63	56	86	64	LG Fuzzy Logic WF-451 (tp) (C)
	1755 #	206	37	57	51	72	79	64	LG Fuzzy Logic WF-801 (tp) (C)
	1148	123	38	50	67	48	83	64	SIMPSON Concorde 365541 (tp) (A)
	1161	123	45	55	67	44	82	64	SIMPSON Enduro 365551 (tp)]
	1161	123	45	55	67	44	82	64	SIMPSON Enduro 365552 (tp)]
	1161	123	45	55	67	44	82	64	SIMPSON Esprit 365550J (tp) (A)]
	1243	126	50	55	59	50	81	64	WHIRLPOOL 6LBR6245EQ (tp)
	1614	172	38	49	58	54	85	64	WHIRLPOOL GLSS5232DQ (tp)
	1573 #	229	9	59	66	54	88	63	DAEWOO Air Power DWF-6094R (tp)
	1642 #	225	18 (T)	58	59 (T)	56	87	63	DAEWOO Air Power DWF-7094R (tp)
	1968	274	16	57	61	58	85	63	DAEWOO Air Power DWF-8094R (tp)
	1536 #	187	25	53	61	52	87	63	LG Fuzzy Logic WF-651 (tp) (C)
	1233	127	44	51	55	48	83	63	WHIRLPOOL 6LBR5132EQ (tp)

If you find a recall or ban not on our list, please let us know. Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after the recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct. For up-to-the-minute information, check our recalls list by clicking the recalls banner at www.choice.com.au.

THE PRODUCT: Gateway has recalled all **foam rubber "Stress Cows"** distributed as a free gift or purchased directly from the computer retailer between September 1996 and September 1999. The cow is white with black spots, 12 cm long and has "Gateway" written in white across its back.

The problem: A potential choking hazard may arise for small children if parts of the Stress Cow are torn or bitten off.

What to do: Dispose of the cow safely or return it to any Gateway store in exchange for a Gateway-branded item of comparable value. For more information call 1800 501 160.

THE PRODUCT: Rover Australia has recalled **Discovery Series II** vehicles built between May 1, 1998, and June 18, 1999, within the following VIN ranges:

- ZA200000 to ZA227449
- ZA900000 to ZA907212

The VIN is displayed on the vehicle identification plate, which can be seen through the front windscreen, on the passenger's side of the dash fascia. The VIN also appears on the identification plate fixed to the radiator support panel.

The problem: Electric contacts may stick momentarily within the anti-lock braking system (ABS) relay. The vehicle may give the feeling of 'self-braking' under normal driving conditions, after releasing the brake pedal. The instrument-panel ABS warning lamp will come on and an alarm will sound.

What to do: All vehicles in the affected range need to be checked and reworked as necessary. Rover Australia has notified all registered owners by letter. Any owner who has not received a recall letter should contact Rover Australia Customer Response Centre on 1800 625 642.

THE PRODUCT: Murrumbidgee Dairy Products has recalled the following products, marked with a use-by date of October 31, 1999:

- Riverina Fresh Contour Milk 1 L
- Riverina Fresh Lite Milk 1 L
- Riverina Fresh Milk 1 L, 600 mL, 300 mL
- Riverina Fresh Coffee Flavoured Milk 600 mL, 300 mL
- Riverina Fresh Chocolate Flavoured Milk 600 mL, 300 mL
- Funny Bones Banana Flavoured Milk 250 mL

Riverina Fresh Vanilla Custard 2 kg and 600 g, with a use-by date of November 17, 1999, has also been recalled.

The problem: Some of the products may contain listeria bacteria. While not likely to cause illness in healthy adults, the bacteria can cause serious problems in pregnant women, elderly people, babies and people with low immune systems. Signs include fever, headache, muscle pain and other flu-like symptoms.

What to do: Dispose of the products immediately. Murrumbidgee Dairy has requested customers advise its Customer Relations, on 1800 816 773, of the batch and time code on these products, and a full refund cheque will be issued.

THE PRODUCT: BMW has recalled **K1200 RS motorcycles** within the following VIN ranges:

- A) ZA21803 to ZA22694
- B) ZA20000 to ZA34226

The VIN can be found on the compliance plate under the seat or stamped on the frame under the right foot rest.

The problems:

A) Motorcycles within the first VIN range may leak at the coolant sealing plugs located near the spark plugs. In an extreme case the plug could drop out, causing a sudden loss of engine coolant.

B) Within the second VIN range the retaining circlip holding the cover over the thermostatic element in the thermostat housing may be incorrectly fitted, and allow oil to leak onto the rear wheel when the motorcycle is in use.

What to do: Motorcycles in both VIN ranges should be returned immediately to an authorised BMW motorcycle dealer for checking and any necessary rectification. BMW is directly contacting owners, but the manufacturer requests owners or riders of affected bikes to contact the BMW Access Centre on 1800 813 299 without delay.

THE PRODUCT: Unilever Foods has recalled **John West Scottish Sardines in Vegetable Oil (110 g pack)** with the batch numbers L9166 or L9213 stamped on one end of the cardboard pack.

The problem: Routine testing indicates a small number of packs within these batches may not meet quality standards. No other batch is affected.

What to do: Return the product to the place of purchase for a full refund. For further details contact Unilever Foods on 1800 801 885.

THE PRODUCT: Daihatsu has recalled **Daihatsu Sirion** vehicles manufactured from April 1998 to March 1999 within the VIN range JDAM100S000500079 to JDAM100S000525616. The VIN is located at the centre of the firewall of the engine compartment.

The problem: There may be a defect in the electrical wiring to the headlights and horn, which could lead to malfunction through constant use.

What to do: Contact your authorised Daihatsu dealer to arrange for free rectification. For further details contact Daihatsu's public affairs department on (02) 9534 4999.

THE PRODUCT: Suzuki has recalled all **1999 model GSX1300R motorcycles** with vehicle identification numbers (VIN) JS1A1131400100004 to JS1A1131400100560. The VIN is stamped on the steering stem.

The problem: The spring of the cam chain tension adjuster may break, causing the engine to stall, with severe internal damage.

What to do: Use the bike as little as possible. Return it to an authorised Suzuki dealer without delay for rectification. For further details contact Suzuki on (03) 9931 0500.

THE PRODUCT: Mirabella International has recalled all **Harlequin Rope Lights** sold in Target and KMart stores. The product is a 9 m long, 18 mm PVC tube with lights inside that flash in a variety of modes as selected by a controller in the supply cord.

The problem: An exposed live wire protruding through the flexible enclosure could cause an electric shock.

What to do: Return the item to the store of purchase for a full refund. For further information call Mirabella on 1800 636 528.

THE PRODUCT: Endeavour Nursery Furniture has recalled all **Emily cot drop-sides** on cots purchased between August 12, 1997, and November 19, 1999. The Emily cot can be identified by a name stamp located on the base of the cot.

The problem: A construction defect in the dropside may cause the slats to become dislodged from the top or bottom rail.

What to do: Don't use the cot until the dropside is replaced. Contact Endeavour Nursery Furniture on 1800 800 585 and the manufacturer will arrange for a replacement dropside free of charge.

THE PRODUCT: Waterford Wedgwood has recalled all **Parkmore shaded lamps** imported since May 1998. The lamps are made of Waterford crystal, featuring two crystal columns, two bulbs and a double lampshade.

The problem: The lamps may not be earthed, as the wires running through part of the metal fitting are not fully insulated.

What to do: Don't use the lamp. The manufacturer is tracking all sales but owners should contact Waterford Wedgwood on 1800 222 0222.

WARNING

THE PRODUCT: Clints Crazy Bargains has issued a warning notice concerning **three-seat garden swings** sold in Clints Crazy Bargains stores since 1996 and continuing.

The problem: When subjected to strong sunlight and water, the awning over the swing and the cushion supports deteriorate rapidly and may give way under weight.

What to do: The swing is not suitable for outdoor use and should only be used in covered areas where it's not exposed to the elements. If you're unhappy with the product, return it to your nearest Clints Crazy Bargains store for a full refund. For further information call Clints on (02) 9830 6777.

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INS/0002

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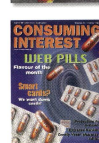
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March 1999 — January/February 2000

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Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.

* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items or letters.

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theHARD word

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How about a little help?

The *hard word* would like to thank all the readers who've responded with examples of outrageous ads, promotions and products. Thanks to L King, A Giles, A Stanley, E&J Moyle, S Rush and G Lomax for their contributions to this month's *The hard word*. Please keep sending them in.

If you have any examples that you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The hard word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email your suggestions to thehardword@choice.com.au.

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